

Lost within Religion # 7

Romans 2: 17-29

There can be no doubt that man is a spiritual being. He is compelled to worship something, even if it is himself. Society has changed dramatically in recent years, but many Americans claim some sort of religious affiliation. The ecumenical movement has created a sense among many that we all serve the same God, and we all will reach the same eternal destiny, even though we are traveling different paths. Statistics repeatedly reveal most agree living a good, moral life is all that is required to be found acceptable to God.

Paul dealt with folks who were devoutly religious. They were deeply committed to keeping the rules and traditions their religion dictated. They placed much reliance on their lineage and maintaining the practices of their fathers. These had never met Christ in salvation, and yet they assumed all was well regarding their spiritual condition. He knew this line of thought was dangerous and would ultimately lead to utter rejection from the Lord. Paul knew Christ was the only means of salvation and he sought to challenge those who placed their dependence on anything other than salvation by grace through faith.

These truths are needed in our day as well. Many are religious but lack a genuine relationship with Christ. I want to examine the [conclusions](#) Paul reached as we consider: [Lost within Religion](#). We find he speaks of:

I. A Boastful Confidence (17-20) – This portion of Romans was written to the Jews who placed their confidence in one's ability to keep the law and maintain religious tradition. They boasted in:

A. Their Heritage (17a) – [Behold, thou art called a Jew...](#) This was something Paul was certainly familiar with. He too had been raised and educated as a Jew. [Phil.3:5 – Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee.](#) He well understood their national pride, viewing themselves as the chosen of God, being made acceptable simply because of their heritage.

- Sadly many today are relying on their heritage to be found acceptable to God. They depend on the fact their family has been a part of a local assembly for years. Maybe their grandfather donated the land where the church was built or the cemetery is located. Maybe their family helped build the church or an ancestor was a pastor or deacon. These are all good, but they never bring salvation. Our earthly heritage is insignificant in regard to salvation and acceptance of God.

B. Their Holiness (17b-18) – Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, ^[18] And knowest *his* will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; Many of them were also boasting in their knowledge of the law of God and adherence to the law. They were depending on their moral character to receive acceptance.

- These practices continue within the church today. Many assume their religious activity will translate into acceptance from God. They are depending on baptism, church membership, Sunday school attendance, reading Scripture, and reciting prayers. Again these are all good and each of us should engage in faithful service unto the Lord, but our works of righteousness are never enough. We could attend Sunday services each Sunday morning, memorize the entire Bible, and pray 24 hours a day and yet be lost without Christ. We are not saved because of our merit or holiness. Salvation is of the Lord.

C. Their Haughtiness (19) – And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness. Certainly the Jews were much different than those around them. They did have the Scriptures. They had the Truth, even if they did not comprehend it. However, they viewed themselves as being the salt of the earth. They prided themselves on their humility, as well as their ability to share the Scriptures with others. They felt the world needed to be as they were.

- Humility is a virtue we all should possess, but it is possible to be proud in light of one's humility. It is possible to feel as if the world would be much better if it were exactly as we are. Humility ought to be found in our lives, but we must guard against pride as well.

D. Their Hierarchy (20) – An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law. Many of the Jews felt superior to other people simply because of their lineage and had a tendency to look down on others. This was especially true regarding spiritual matters. They refused to believe one could be acceptable to God apart from the laws and religious traditions they practiced. Religious zeal can be a good thing as long as it doesn't result in legalism. The Jews thought they had it all figured out and yet they remained lost in sin. They condemned others for not conforming to their ideals and they were not acceptable to God either.

- We continue to deal with the legalistic view today. Many are very zealous in their practices and quick to condemn others who don't follow their line of thought. We ought to be zealous for the Lord and maintain a high, biblical standard, but we must not resort to legalism. Our salvation isn't dependent upon keeping certain creeds, dressing a certain way, or running with the right groups. We must rely on the saving grace of God alone! There is no need to expect people to follow tradition or man-made theology. If we will exalt Jesus and make much of Him, then we can have confidence that we are pointing people in the right direction!

II. A Blemished Consecration (21-24) – The Jews boasted of their superiority and never realized their spiritual condition was blemished. Paul points out:

A. Their Hypocrisy (21-22) – Although they could spot the faults in others and held them to a high standard, they ignored their own faults and failures. They condemned activities in others that they were committing themselves.

- Often those who continually spot weakness or failure in others are desperately trying to hide their own weakness and failure. I am leery of those who never have anything good to say about anyone. We cannot support or condone sin, but we must be careful that we don't condemn others while practicing the very things we seek to condemn.

B. Their Apostasy (23) – *Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?* Paul reveals a great tragedy. These boasted of their adherence to the law, even though they knew they were not keeping the high standard they imposed on everyone else. Their actions brought dishonor and reproach rather than glory and honor. They were viewed by society as the hypocrites they actually were.

- That is the biggest complaint against the church today. Many view us as only hypocrites, preaching one way and living another. We must be careful that we don't bring reproach upon the Lord, even as we portray a right relationship with Him. We are a Christian everywhere we go. We are responsible for a positive witness in every situation. We must maintain our integrity and adhere to the very Word we proclaim!

C. Their Blasphemy (24) – *For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written.* Their hypocrisy and apostasy had devastating consequences. The lives they lived actually caused the Gentiles who knew them to blaspheme the God they were supposed to serve. Although they may not have blasphemed the Lord's name directly, they were in essence responsible. They had caused others to deny the Truth.

- That really puts things in a proper perspective. Others watch the lives we live. They see and know whether we are genuine or not. Those who are merely religious cause more harm to the body of Christ and His good name than those who claim no association with Him. We are responsible to bear witness of our Lord and be an effective witness to the world!

III. A Bitter Condemnation (25-29) – Finally Paul speaks of the condemnation these will face.

A. The Guilt of Sin (25) – For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. The Jews held circumcision in high regard. It served as their identification with Abraham and even with God. They counted on such identification to provide redemption. Paul declares that although they may have physically been circumcised, if they failed to keep all the law, in the eyes of God they were not better than the uncircumcised heathen. He points out that salvation is not an outward act, but an inward change!

- Many today are counting on something no more significant than circumcision. They may be counting on religious activity, but that alone will never suffice. God sees the condition of the heart, not just the outward display. Our salvation is in Christ alone, and apart from Him we remain in sin.

B. The Glare of Sanctification (26-28) – They claimed righteousness by practice and association, and yet others who did not adhere to their practices lived more righteously than they did. The righteousness of others bore witness against their unrighteousness. The Jews certainly did not like this, but it was true nonetheless. Some who were considered heathens by the Jews were living pleasing to the Lord, having experienced salvation in Christ.

- Men may hide their guilt behind a religious façade, but God sees the heart. The lives of believers bears witness to the power of God in salvation. Mere religious activity cannot change a man, but genuine salvation can. One may do good works for a while, but eventually he will fall. The believer may fall as well, but he is not depending on good works to save. I have witnessed too many changed lives to doubt the power of God in salvation. The righteousness of Christ fleshed out in the lives of believers brings conviction to those who deny His saving power.

C. The Grace of Salvation (29) – But he *is* a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision *is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.* Many of the Jews may have denied this truth, but Paul confirms God's grace has been extended to all men. Salvation isn't reserved for those who claim lineage to Abraham. It isn't reserved for those who practice circumcision. It isn't obtained through keeping the letter of the law. It isn't offered only to those who are deemed worthy of men. It is freely given of God to all who will come to Christ by faith. They could continue to condemn and reject others, but God would receive them in grace.

- The modern church needs this reminder as well. Many tend to expect certain traditions be observed if one is to be saved. Many think they can spot those whom God would save. Many restraints and expectations have been added to grace. Salvation is not obtained through the devices of man nor hindered by them either. Salvation is obtained through faith in Christ alone. It is available to all who respond to the Spirit's call. They may not fit our mold, but God is more than able to save regardless of our expectations or demands. Religion doesn't save, Christ does!

Conclusion: Many were confused and deceived in Paul's day. Much emphasis was placed on traditions and practices that could never save. Many thought they were the only ones acceptable to God, and sadly they did not know Him. Paul sought to expose their error and point them to Christ. He knew salvation was of the Lord, not in works.

This struggle continues today. Many assume their religious affiliation or good deeds will merit salvation. They hope it will be enough to appease God and gain entrance into heaven. Many will be mistaken and eternally separated from God. I fear many today are very sincere, but they are sincerely wrong. Hell will be filled with good intentions. Do you know Christ as your Savior? What are you counting on when this life is through? If your hope is in anything but salvation by grace through faith, you remain without hope. Trust Christ in salvation!