

EXPOSITION OF ROMANS

Message #10

Romans 2:17-29

Probably the most difficult person to reach for Jesus Christ is the religious person, particularly one who has been a leader. These kinds of people attend the services, they know truth, they teach, they understand concepts, but refuse to acknowledge their need and refuse to trust Jesus Christ as Savior.

IT MAKES NO DIFFERENCE HOW RELIGIOUS A PERSON IS; WITHOUT A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST THAT PERSON IS GUILTY . AND CONDEMNED BEFORE GOD.

Many religious people will go to hell. These will be people who knew about Jesus but did not have a relationship with Him. Listen to the words of Jesus Christ speaking of His judgment: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness’” (Matthew 7:21-23).

FACT #1 – One’s guilt before God is not eliminated by religious heritage. **2:17-20**

Paul begins this section with a series of “ if ” clauses. In the Greek language these are called first class conditional clauses and could be translated “ since .” This kind of “if” clause indicates that the mindset Paul is describing was in fact a reality with the religious Jew.

It seems to me that we can legitimately say they are connected to **verses 21-24**, which ends up meaning this - Since you think this way about yourself (**2:17-20**), this is the way you really are before God (**2:21-24**).

The verbs used in the “if” clauses are all present tense, meaning this is the way the religious Jew continually and habitually thought.

Accomplishment #1 - The religious unsaved person relies upon his lineage. **2:17a**

To be a Jew was, to the mind of many, an automatic guarantee that one was right with God.

Accomplishment #2 - The religious unsaved person relies upon the Law. **2:17b**

These Jews falsely trusted in the Law and in the fact that they kept it.

Accomplishment #3 - The religious unsaved person relies upon his boasting. **2:17c**

The Jew loved to boast about his special relationship with God. The religious Jew could recite from history the many things God had done for Israel.

Accomplishment #4 - The religious unsaved person relied upon his knowledge . **2:18a**

The article appears in the original text before “will” meaning Paul had a specific will in mind. The Jews were fully aware of God’s will being worked out through a Messianic plan.

Accomplishment #5 - The religious unsaved person relies upon his instruction . **2:18b**

A religious lost person is one who had been thoroughly indoctrinated in the Law. In fact the word “instructed” is the word from which we get our English word catechism .

Accomplishment #6 - The religious unsaved person relies upon himself . **2:19-20**

The religious Jew described in these verses continually had a confidence in himself for salvation, not in his relationship with Christ .

1) He was confident that he was a guide to those blind . **2:19a**

Specifically the religious Jew saw himself as one who could give sight to the poor blind Gentile .

2) He was confident that he could give light to those in darkness . **2:19b**

Religious lost people really believe they can lead others out of their darkness into light.

3) He was confident that he was an instructor of the foolish. **2:20a**

The religious Jew believed that one who trusted only in Christ for salvation was mentally deficient.

4) He was confident that he was a teacher of the immature . **2:20b**

The religious Jew considered himself to be the mature teacher who could in a mature way add the Law to simple faith so he could help these spiritual babies.

The basic thrust of all this was that the Jew had total confidence in himself for salvation . His trust and confidence was not in Jesus Christ; it was in himself.

FACT #2 – One’s guilt before God is established by religious works . **2:21-24**

In this section, Paul asks a series of five questions designed to show that the one who relies upon his religion is guilty before God.

Work #1 - Works that deceive self. **2:21a**

Not teaching one’s own self in the correct way is a great deception .

Work #2 - Works that steal . **2:21b**

These false leaders were guilty of stealing people away from the truth. In fact, the Greek word “steal” (Klepto - from which we get our word kleptomaniac) is one oftentimes used metaphorically for false teachers (G. Abbott-Smith, p. 248).

Work #3 - Works that are adulterous . **2:22a**

There are three ways one can commit adultery in the mind of God: 1) Mentally , 2) Physically , 3) Spiritually . Spiritual adultery is to give oneself to worshipping something other than the true God. Whenever one promotes a religious teaching not consistent with God’s Word, it is adulterous .

Work #4 - Works that are sacrilegious . **2:22b**

There were religious leaders in Paul’s day who robbed temples. They took money from God’s people and never fed them or taught them properly the true, pure ways of God.

Work #5 - Works that are dishonoring . **2:23**

These religious people were guilty of not honoring God. These were leaders who were boasting about their heritage, about the Law and their righteousness, and they were guilty of dishonoring God.

Work #6 - Works that blaspheme . **2:24**

Paul brings this thought to a conclusion by quoting from two Old Testament texts - Isaiah 52:5 and Ezekiel 36:18-24.

Isaiah 52:5 refers to the blaspheming of God by the heathen who had persecuted God’s nation Israel. Their persecution against God’s people was actually a blasphemy against God.

Ezekiel 36:18-24 refers to the terrible testimony that Israel had before the heathen. Their lifestyle was a blasphemy against God.

FACT #3 – One’s guilt is not eliminated by religious rites that are external, but by a righteous heart that is internal. **2:25-29**

The conjunction “for” which begins **verse 25** explains further what Paul is saying; namely, it is not the external religion that makes one right with God, it is the internal righteousness only found by faith in Jesus Christ that makes one right with God.

The Jew specifically prided himself on his circumcision . In fact, he believed that he had a covenant relationship with God because he had been circumcised. Today we could use the illustration of baptism . There are many people who actually believe if you have been physically baptized in water, you are saved .

Verse 25 says if you are able to meet all of the prerequisites of the Law, circumcision might mean something; but if you are not able, circumcision doesn't mean anything. If you transgress one Law, your circumcision cannot save you. The verb "practice" is present tense. The meaning is if you can continually keep the Law, then circumcision means something.

Verse 26-27 makes it clear that if one were able to keep the Law: **1)** God would consider him to be circumcised even if he wasn't circumcised. God would consider him to be in a proper relationship with Him (**2:26**); and **2)** That one would actually wind up judging the one who didn't keep the Law even if he were circumcised (**2:27**).

Verse 28 begins with a conjunction "for" which further explains what Paul is saying - namely, being in a right relationship with God has nothing to do with external, outward religious rites like circumcision, but has everything to do with the inward heart which has been sovereignly touched by the Holy Spirit (**2:29**). (Also see Galatians 5:2-4)

The person who is really right with God will not get much praise from men but will receive his praise from God.

You may be here and have been in all kinds of religious rituals. You may be a member of a church, you may tithe, you may have been baptized in water or by water. You can still miss heaven and go to hell. Outward religious activity doesn't prove anything. What proves something is your heart. Has God's Spirit really caused you to be born again? All mankind is guilty before God including the religious people. There is only one way to be righteous - the just shall live by faith. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.