

Wednesday Evening Bible Study

December 7, 2022

Series - *The Life and Writings of the Apostle Paul*

The Letter to the Romans

The Righteousness of God

Text – Romans 2:17 - 29 – *The Wrath of God Revealed Against the Self-Righteous Jew*

Introduction

Did you ever meet someone that had a reputation for being a very religious person, and yet was also known for behavior that was diametrically opposed to what they claimed to believe? Did that person persuade you to be a part of the religious group that he or she belonged to? Mahatma Gandhi was famous for saying, *"I love your Christ, but I dislike your Christianity"*¹. Before I became a Christian, I was acquainted with a man who was a deacon in a Baptist church and flaunted his spiritual position arrogantly to everyone around him. Unfortunately, this man was also well known for his extra-marital relationship with a woman he worked with. This is the type of behavior that Paul is continuing to condemn as we continue our study of chapter two. He is not as much rebuking their bad behavior here as he is proving their human depravity and their desperate need for a Saviour.

Paul will now narrow the field down even more. In the beginning of the chapter, Paul may have been addressing any moral, religious man, whether Jew or Gentile, but here in these remaining verses of chapter two he specifically focuses on the lost and self-righteous Jew. He already got their attention when he made the statement in v. 11 that God is not a respecter of persons. Jews thought they had an exclusive with God, but they had rejected the payment made by Christ on the cross and were trusting in their own righteousness to save them. Paul will now reveal the wrath of God against these self-righteous Jews because of the following three characteristics that they exhibited in their lives, but were apparently unable to see in themselves:

I. Their Attitude That Was Haughty (vs. 17 – 20)

"17 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; 19 And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, 20 An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law." (Romans 2:17-20)

¹ Jones, E Stanley *The Christ of the Indian Road* (published in 1925 by The Abington Press, New York City)

A. The Jews were a very privileged people:

1. They Were Invited to Worship.

They were specifically called out by God and given a special covenant relationship with Him:

"For the LORD'S portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: So the LORD alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him. He made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields; and he made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock; Butter of kine, and milk of sheep, with fat of lambs, and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, with the fat of kidneys of wheat; and thou didst drink the pure blood of the grape." (Deuteronomy 32:9-14)

- a) *He promised them the Land of Israel.*
- b) *He promised them the Nation of Israel.*
- c) *He provided for them.*
- d) *He protected them.*

All they were supposed to do was to love Him and worship Him only, but they committed spiritual adultery by worshipping other gods, and they became as immoral as the nations that surrounded them.

2. They Were Instructed in the Word. (See also Romans 3:1 – 2)

The Bible was given through the prophets, and now the apostles to the Jews.

3. They Imparted the Messiah to the World

Jesus was born a Jew, from the tribe of Judah; a descendent of David.

B. They Were a Proudful People

Notice the words used in vs. 17 – 20 – “boasteth”, “confident”. They saw themselves as guides, lights, and instructors. The problem with that was that they did not recognize their own need.

Preaching Point – Be careful about pride!

Christians sometimes see themselves as being better than other people. They may think that because God saved them that He somehow likes them better than those that are lost. They forget that they themselves are hell-deserving sinners, saved by the grace of God.

"When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom." (Proverbs 11:2)

"Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall." (Proverbs 16:18)

*"For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself."
(Galatians 6:3)*

"Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble." (1 Peter 5:5)

"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith." (Romans 12:3)

II. Their Actions That Were Hypocritical (vs. 21 – 24)

"21 Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? 22 Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?" (Romans 2:21-22)

Dr. Paul Fedena states that these Jews of Paul's day would not sacrifice to idols, but some of them sold the idols in the marketplace, and others purchased cuts of meat that they knew were sacrificed to idols because they were cheaper.

"23 Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? 24 For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written." (Romans 2:23-24)

Nathan the prophet told David that because he had committed adultery with Bathsheba, and because he had Uriah killed, that he caused the enemies of God to blaspheme. (2 Samuel 12:14)

Preaching Point – Practice What You Preach!

People are watching you, and they are judging Christ based upon both your attitude and actions. Make sure your attitude exhibits humility, and make sure your actions back up your belief system.

"Nothing is more damaging to the cause of Christ, and offensive to the lost world than a Christian who doesn't live like one."

None of us are perfect, but our lives ought to be more characteristic of the Spirit of God within us, than with the world around us.

We are not saved by our works, but our works will demonstrate to others that we are truly a redeemed people. Live like a Christian!

III. Their Adamant Hearts (vs. 25 – 29)

"25 For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. 26 Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? 27 And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law? 28 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: 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." (Romans 2:25-29)

Circumcision was a sign of the covenant that God made with Abraham:

"And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed. He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant."

(Genesis 17:9-14)

Paul was not stating here that circumcision was wrong, or that the Jews should no longer observe it. What he is saying, however, is that if an uncircumcised man is living a life that is yielded to God through faith, is he not more set apart for God than the man who is circumcised in his flesh but is in rebellion.

Dr. Paul Fedena states:

What Paul is saying is that circumcision may identify a person physically with a nation, but it cannot change the heart. That requires an inward "cutting away" of something more than mere flesh! Lawbreakers negate the symbolism of circumcision and God looks on them as His people only nationally, not spiritually.

Paul argues that the righteousness of the uncircumcised is more likely to gain God's favor than the unrighteousness of the circumcised.

In Colossians Paul speaks of a circumcision “made w/out hands” which is superior to a fleshly circumcision.²

In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: (Colossians 2:11)

Circumcision had become a mere formality, a ritual. What was intended to be a symbol of a wonderful relationship with God had instead become a badge of superiority and pride. The Jews looked down their noses on those that were uncircumcised.

Preaching Point – Our Lives Better Honor Our Baptism

Baptism today is also a symbol of our identification with Christ. We dishonor our baptism, and our Christ when we boast about our baptism, and yet don’t live and love like Christ.

Illustration – when I graduated college and was ordained, they told me that if I ever changed from my independent, fundamental Baptist position, that they expected me to turn in my ordination papers. Why? Because I was no longer representing what they ordained me to do.

My baptism becomes un-baptism, my membership is like un-membership when I don’t live like a Christian.

² Fedena, Paul *Bible Studies in Romans*, Lesson 11 “Are You a Jew”