

Romans 2:17-3:31

Why Religious People Need the Gospel

We have noted here in Chapter 1-3 of Romans that Paul is building a case that we all are sinners – in need of a Savior

A) We all have need of the gospel

B) **Picture a Courtroom** – what is on trial is all human kind – the object of the case is to prove that all human kind are sinners

C) Now to prove that case we would not need to bring the Bible into the courtroom

1) **We could bring: The News** – news cast from the last year – what the news cast would prove is that man is broken and full of sin

We could bring Hollywood

A) What is portrayed on the scene – what is happening behind the scenes – Sinners and broken

B) Top universities in the nation and the educators in those universities their private lives – Prove sinners

C) If we are honest we could bring – each one of our lives – past year proven

1) We are sinners and we are broken

Paul starts his case in 1:18-32 Focus was on the **Rebellious** – those who denounce God – reject the creator – worship creation

A) Self

B) **Chapter 2:1-16 His focus is on the Moralist** – those who think that they are good enough

C) **We come to 2:17 today – his focus is on the religious** – those who think their religious practices or affiliation is ENOUGH

D) Paul is going to pinpoint the Jewish people – Jewish religion –

1) he speaks from experience – what he came out of

E) But we will see tonight that what he shares could be applied to anyone leaning on their religious affiliation or practices

1) Even those who profess to be born again Christians

Remember Duck and Cover drills in Elementary School?

A) In the event of a Nuclear attack – or earthquake – duck and cover under your desk – safest place in Nuclear attack

B) That **little desk is going to protect you** – but in reality what it was doing was giving you a false sense of security

C) **That is the Problem with many people who are leaning on their religious affiliation –**

1) False sense of security

V.17 Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God,¹⁸ and know *His* will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law,¹⁹ and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,²⁰ an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law.

In this one sentence the apostle notes that their sense of privilege had 5 aspects.

1. **Heritage *they were called Jews***, which means “praise to Jehovah.”

So proud were they of this name that many of the Jews living in Gentile cities used it as a surname. *Rob Salvato, Jew.*

2. **They possessed the Law** – God’s word had been given to them.

3. **They took pride in their special relationship to God** – Chosen people

4. **They took pride that they were instructed in the word of God.**

5. **Involved in ministry** – They were instructors, teaching others, guides to the blind.

These 5 things were wonderful privileges. But as wonderful as they were, they had a deluding effect on the Jews.

A) When they compared their enlightenment with the abysmal **theological ignorance of the Gentiles** they looked very good.

B)Of course they were acceptable to God!

1)Always find someone worse than me.

C)We today recognize their spiritual blindness. But the blade cuts both ways, does it not?

1)The sword that pierces the heart of the religious Jew also pierces

People today – False sense of security – Americans – “Christian Nation” Money says in God we trust

A)We can also have a false sense of security – we possess the word of God – we know the Bible – we study the Bible

B)False sense of security in – We are involved in Ministry – we teach others

C)But if our confidence is in those things and not Jesus – we are just as guilty as the people Paul is writing too!

D)Paul is going to point out – two key principals –

#1 There is a difference in Knowing about God’s word and doing it

A)#2 There is a difference between knowing about God and actually Knowing him

²¹ You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? ²² You who say, “Do not commit adultery,” do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³ You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? ²⁴ For “*the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,*” as it is written.

Paul lists three ways in which the self-confident moral Jew he is speaking to is not practicing what he teaches.

A)He steals (v 21); he commits adultery; (V.22) he hates idolatry, yet robs temples (v 22).

B)Moralism fails because we are all inconsistent in our behavior.

C)We have the law, but no one keeps it. We break it in two ways.

1)First, there is occasional outright hypocrisy.

The person who claims to be pious and God fearing who in reality is living a double life – blinded to their own sin.

A)More subtle forms of Hypocrisy – little white lies – cutting corners at work – stealing extra time on our lunch break

B)Purposely Not being accurate on our tax returns

1)All forms of Hypocrisy

The 2nd are the continual sins of the heart and motives.

A)This is what Paul likely means in his third charge: “you who abhor idols, do you rob temples?” (v 22).

B)It is possible that some Jews, see this often in the OT were worshipping idols

C)But this is probably more figurative -a broader interpretation would be that –

1)they were engaging in the same practices the idols represented gods of pleasure – gods of money – gods of sexual immorality

D)These sins were rampant in the Jewish community – they were involved in heart – Jesus said – lust adultery

E)Paul reveals V.24 that this Hypocrisy only caused the gentiles to blaspheme the God of Israel

The application for us today is this: The sins of the Jewish community are just as prevalent in the Christians community

A)How can we tell if our faith is empty – dead and under God’s judgment? Two signs

B)#1 We know the truth in theory – Know it intellectually – but our lives are never changed by that truth.

C)We maybe see how a sermon should convict others – “I wish my husband was here to hear that today”

1)We see how it should convict others but we never let it convict us

#2 There is legalism that produces a moral superiority.

A) Inside we see ourselves as superior to someone else because we are engaged in these “spiritual practices”

B) We look down on those who are not living up to the standard that we have set – when in reality – we don’t live up to it either

C) The Problem is – **God knows our hearts** – and the name of God is blasphemed among the non believers

1) Legalism is always distasteful to those outside the faith!

Why would I want to be a Christian? They are all hypocrites!

A) They very things people would condemn in public they are engaged in – in private or at the least in their heart

B) We too worship the gods of money – seen in our Covetousness – envy – fantasizing – about life seen in Facebook & Instagram

C) We worship the gods of pleasure and sexual immorality – in our private lives

1) Kids who say Why follow the God of my parents – they live by a, “do as I say not as I do mentality.”

Now in V.25 Paul introduces another thing that the Jews would take confidence in – the ritual of circumcision.

²⁵ For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.

Circumcision was #1 an identification of God’s covenant people, an outward sign of what was to be an inward reality;

A) #2 an illustration of God’s dealing with the flesh.

B) In the Old Testament, God defined how the illustration of circumcision was intended to work.

- Exodus 6:12 speaks of the circumcision of the lips.
- Jeremiah 6:10 speaks of the circumcision of the ears.
- Ezekiel 44 speaks of the circumcision of the heart.

C) God’s people were to speak with tenderness, hear with sensitivity, feel with compassion.

D) Circumcision was meant to be a picture externally of the transformation that takes place internally.

1) Yet although the Jews were outwardly circumcised,

2) they were far from where they should have been internally.

E) So their circumcision meant nothing

We have a similar thing in Christianity in Baptism.

A) Baptism for identification with Jesus – follower – going on record – outward profession of an inward work

B) Also symbolic – of a death and resurrection – walk in a newness of life

C) But if we are really not walking in that newness of life – if we are really not following Christ – Baptism means nothing!

Notice how Paul continues this thought on circumcision –

Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his **uncircumcision be counted as circumcision?**²⁷ And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, *even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law?*²⁸ For he is not a Jew who *is one* outwardly, nor *is* circumcision that which *is* outward in the flesh; ²⁹ but *he is a Jew who is one* inwardly; and *circumcision is that* of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise *is* not from men but from God.

The physical sign of circumcision or in our case baptism means nothing if the outward life doesn’t match –

A) God is most concerned about the heart –

B) so a person who is uncircumcised/ unbaptized person lives like their life is set apart to God –

1) that is better in God’s eyes

but *he is a Jew who is one* inwardly; and *circumcision is that* of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise *is* not from men but from God.

I like Dr. Barnhouse’s rendering:

For he is not a Christian who is one outwardly, nor is that “church membership” which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Christian who is one inwardly; and “church membership” is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God.

C) It is so easy to be self-deceived by our familiarity with the truth and/or our religious affiliations.

1) But God is not fooled at all.

D) As we move into chapter 3 Paul anticipates the objection of the Jews

The following verses are maybe best understood as a Q&A discussion with Paul and his imaginary reader:

Q. What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision?

A. 2 Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God.

Yes it is an advantage – you have been given God’s word – which reveals who God is –

A) God is the **all-powerful Creator** who completely sustains the universe.

B) It reveals that he is perfect in holiness, in righteousness, in love, in justice.

C) God’s word also reveals to us the nature and purpose of man

1) Nature – created in the image of God –

2) Purpose to live in relationship with God – reflect his glory

D) God’s word reveals the problem – Sin fallen short

1) And the remedy – God would send a Savior

E) That is a great advantage!

Ok the imaginary listener would say

Q. 3 For what if some did not believe? “If some were without faith” is a better translation Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? Shall their lack of faith cancel out the faithfulness of God?

A. 4 Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: “That You may be justified in Your words, And may overcome when You are judged.”

Paul meets this by going back to the first question and answer.

A) Now if the advantage of the Jew did not serve the intended purpose, does this not mean God’s faithfulness to His people is annulled?

B) The Jew failed; doesn’t that mean God failed? No.

C) God’s promise to send Israel the Redeemer was not defeated by their willful disobedience and rejection.

1) All His promises for the future of the nation will be fulfilled to His glory in spite of their unbelief.

Now a person may not like that fact, but I personally thank God that His promises to me do not depend on my faithfulness.

A) If it had depended on me, I would have been lost long ago. Thank God for His faithfulness!

B) God is true and men are liars – the faithfulness of God is true and cannot be changed.

C) God would deliver on his promise to bring a Savior from the Jewish race regardless of the faithfulness of the Jews.

Q. 5 But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unjust who inflicts wrath? (I speak as a man.) that is purely human reasoning – at it is absurd

To put it another way:

A) Ok – So God is faithful regardless of what we do so our unfaithfulness just highlights by way of contrast his faithfulness – so it would seem unfair for God to judge me if I am just carrying out his intended plan.

A. 6 Certainly not! For then how will God judge the world? God would not be a just judge if that were true

7 For if the truth of God has increased through my lie to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner? Makes no sense and If that was the case 8 And why

not say, “Let us do evil that good may come”?—as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say. Their condemnation is just.

Paul doesn't even entertain that argument – he simply says that about those who are spreading that lie – their condemnation is just – they will get what they deserve

Closing arguments

9 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.

Paul is referring back to his argument that began in 1:18 – **the World both Jews and Gentiles are given to Sin – Established that fact**

Paul proceeds to give a long list of sin's effects on us.

A)Not only do we need to accept that we are sinners; we need also to begin to grasp the problem of the reality of our sinfulness.

B)And Paul provides layer after layer of evidence, we see in stark terms who we are, and what this means for us.

C)There are 8 effects that sin has:

1. Our legal standing. 10 As it is written: “There is none righteous, no, not one;

A)No one is legally righteous, and no one's deeds can change that. We are guilty and condemned (v 10).

2. Our minds. 11**There is none who understands;**

A)Because our core nature is corrupted by sin, we don't understand God's truth.

B)We are “darkened in [our] understanding ... because of the ignorance that is in [us] due to the **hardening of [our] hearts**” (Ephesians 4:18).

C)Ignorance does not cause hardness of hearts (**we don't know about God, so we don't love him**); instead, heart-hardness causes lack of understanding.

D)That is because our sinful self-centeredness leads us to filter out a lot of reality.

1)It is a form of denial; we are blind to many truths and our thinking does not compute data as it should.

3.Our motives. “There is none who seeks after God. (Romans 3:11b).

A)None of us really want to find him; rather, we are running and hiding from him in all we do, even in our religion and morality.

B)No one comes to the father unless the father first draws him –

1)Innately man isn't interested in pursuing or seeking God –

C)You might have thought – well I decided one day to go to church

1)In reality – God was drawing you long before that – making you aware of your emptiness

4. Our wills. 12 **They have all turned aside;**

A)This carries echoes of Isaiah 53:6: “**All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way**” (KJV).

B)There is a willfulness about our wandering.

1)Sin can be defined as our demand for self-determination, for the right to choose our own paths.

5. Our behavior They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.”

A)Now this does not mean that there is no good in humanity!

B)Of course there is – we have been made in the image of God

Of course man is capable of good

C)But inherently we are not good – inherently we are selfish and looking out for #1

1)Even when we do something good our motive is for our own personal gain – or status – how it is going to benefit us

6. Our tongues. 13“**Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit**”; “**The poison of asps is under their lips**”;

14 “**Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.**”

A) Again it is not that man is not capable of speaking what is good – but we are so prone to use our words to hurt

B) Jesus said – what comes out of the mouth reveals the heart – Matthew 15:18-19 *But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.* “

7. Our relationships. 15 “Their feet are swift to shed blood; 16 Destruction and misery are in their ways; 17 And the way of peace they have not known.”

A) This is how sin affects our relationships: we are after each other’s blood—sometimes literally,

B) more often in seeking to push down those who get in our way or in the way of our proposed happiness –

1) Or what we think we want – Dog eat dog world –

C) Climb your way to the top – go through or over whoever gets in your way!

8. Our relationship to God. “There is no fear of God before [our] eyes” (v 18).

A) Fear of the Lord – Reverence and respect and honor –

B) The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom

C) A lack of the fear of the Lord – produces all manner of folly

19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. 20 Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

A) This is the purpose of the law – to reveal the fact that we are sinners

B) Sets the bar – so we see that we fall short !

C) Because it is only – when we see that we are sinners that we understand our need of a Savior

D) So the pagan – Guilty – the law of creation – the Moralists the law of conscience – the Jew and religious person the Law of God

Everything is building to this point – began in 1:18 The wrath of God is revealed

A) The righteousness of God is revealed in the law – problem is we couldn’t keep it – follow it

B) That put us under wrath – V.21 ²¹ But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²² even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

C) There is a righteousness of God that is revealed – what the prophets spoke of – pointed to Jesus –
1) Righteousness comes to those who put their faith in Jesus

D) Righteousness that is to all and on all who believe – Jew or Gentile it makes no difference to God

1) All sinned – fallen short – all have the opportunity to be made right – faith in Jesus

Martyn Lloyd-Jones sums it up:

“The man who has faith is the man who is no longer looking at himself, and no longer looking to himself. He no longer looks at anything he once was. He does not look at what he is now. He does not look at what he hopes to be ... He looks entirely to the Lord Jesus Christ and his finished work, and he rests on that alone.”

²⁴ being justified **freely** by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God set forth *as* a propitiation by His blood, {**satisfaction of the just requirement of breaking the law of God**} **through faith**, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, ²⁶ to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might **be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.**

²⁷ **Where is boasting then? It is excluded.** By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith.

²⁸ **Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.** ²⁹ Or *is He* the God of the Jews only? *Is He* not also the God of the Gentiles?

Yes, of the Gentiles also, ³⁰ since *there is* one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. ³¹ Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.

The purpose of the law is to drive us toward faith in Jesus

The Bad news – the Wrath of God is revealed against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men

All sinners – all condemned & all doomed

The good news – the Righteousness of God is revealed through faith in Jesus Christ