

28. The Book of Romans 2:17-22

Paul's Epistle to the Romans
A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier
(9-6-23)

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This evening we find ourselves in the first main section of the Book of Romans.

This first section falls under the heading of “**Condemnation**” because in it Paul wants to prove that the whole human race, apart from Christ, is condemned by God—which means at one point He *will* judge the world.

Last week we looked briefly at the *judgment of believers* (1 Corinthians 3:12-15).

When it comes to the *judgment of unbelievers*, I'll refer you to Revelation 20:11-15—a passage we've looked at numerous times (check out our Revelation study on this judgment).

Romans 2:17–24 (NKJV)

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. 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.

Let me begin with a true story that I think will help set the stage for our study tonight.

→ Listen: The school in Arlington, TX that invested a lot of money in a brand-new state of the art sprinkler system...that those who installed it forgot to hook up...

Now, some might argue that to have a state-of-the-art sprinkler system—even if it's not hooked up—is better than to not have one at all—but I believe just the opposite is true.

Look, if the principal and administrators of that school had known the sprinkler system wasn't hooked up—they would have immediately had someone come out and finish the job! The problem was they trusted the company (trained professionals) to install the system properly.

I'm confident that those installing the system no doubt *thought* they had finished the job and probably told the leaders of the school that everything was completed and ready to go. But those school officials were the victims of false information which gave them a false sense of security.

A false sense of security that could have resulted in the deaths of numerous students if a fire had broken out because—a sprinkler system that isn't hooked up can't save anyone!

I believe that people need to feel a sense of security in their lives if they're going to have any semblance of peace. In fact, insecure people tend to have emotional problems because people *need* to feel secure.

The dictionary defines 'security' as: *the state of being or feeling secure; freedom from fear, anxiety, danger; something that gives the assurance of safety or protection.*

However, if our security and peace isn't rooted in fact—it is therefore based on a lie and is useless to protect us and save our lives in an emergency.

As I said, I believe that everyone wants to live their life with a sense of security—whether it's economic security, job security, home security, or national security. **But I also believe that most people want *spiritual* security as well!**

This would encompass freedom from the fear of death because they have a sense of peace about meeting God someday—in other words, they feel safe from judgment and hell.

Now, this is the very issue that Paul is dealing with in this section of Romans Chapter 2 verses 17-29.

In this section Paul is addressing primarily the Jews who were the epidemic of those who were *religious* and therefore had a sense of security and peace about coming judgment—but it was false security and peace based on false information—that the Law could save them.

I'm sure some would argue that to have religion—even if it's not being practiced—is better than having no religion at all—but I disagree. I disagree because it gives people a false sense of security—and as Jesus taught, this false sense of security will be carried by many—right into Judgment Day:

Matthew 7:21–23 (NKJV)

²¹ "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. ²² Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' ²³ And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

As we've already looked at—Jesus said it's not what a person *professes* that proves their faith is genuine it's what they practice—that faith only becomes real and genuine when it's rooted in obedience.

The Jewish people in Paul's day felt secure from God's judgment based on 3 primary things—

1. Their heritage—they were descendants of Abraham.
2. They had been given God's Law—*which made them special in God's eyes and gave them special privileges—including and especially that it exempted them from judgment.*
3. They were circumcised—*which brought them into the covenant God made with Israel which further exempted them from judgment.*

So, in this section Paul sets about to systematically destroy this false security that the Jews had barricaded themselves in—and he does so by showing them that: their heritage can't save them (v. 17-20); that having the Law can't save them (v. 21-24); and that circumcision won't save them either (v. 25-29).

But in so doing he dismantles every religious person's false assurance as we shall see—whether they are Catholic, Protestant or anyone else who is trusting in religious forms, ceremonies, and rituals that give them a sense of security—but cannot save them from judgment.

I. Heritage—v.17-20

Romans 2:17–20 (NKJV)

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.

A. "Indeed you are called a Jew..."—v.17a

"Jew"—speaks of their nationality.

The Jews were particularly proud of their *nationality*—so proud in fact that many Jews living in Gentile cities used it as a surname—"*Phil Ballmaier, Jew.*"

The term '**Jew**' first show up in the O.T. in 2Kings 16:6 (KJV) and probably comes from the word '*Judah*' which means '*praise*', although some think it comes from the word '*Judaism*.'

It became an umbrella term for their— race, their nationality, their heritage, and their religion. It was a badge of honor for them, which they wore proudly because it distinguished them as different, separate, and unique among all the other nations and peoples of the world.

So much so that to call themselves Jews was their *boast*, their *bragging* right—"We're better than everyone else—why? Because we're Jews, the children of Abraham." (Gen. 12:1-3)

They actually believed that Father Abraham stood outside the gates of hell to pluck out of the line of people—any *unrighteous* Jews who were going in.

Matthew 3:7–9 (NKJV)

⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, ⁹ and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.

B. "and rest (rely) on the Law" —v.17b

They thought that because God gave *them* the Law (God's righteous commandments) to be guardians and keepers of the oracles of God that this made them special and superior to everyone else.

This special standing with God was based not on their *practicing* the Law but on their *possessing* the Law.

C. "and make your boast in God" —v.17c

The Jews boasted in *their* knowledge of the one true God and looked down on the Gentiles for their spiritual ignorance in worshipping their many false gods.

But they also boasted in God's knowledge of them—"You only have I known of all the families of the earth..." (Amos 3:2a)

They stopped there and didn't read the rest of the verse—"Therefore, I will punish you for all your iniquities." (Amos 3:2 NKJV)

D. "and know His will" —v.18a

They knew God's will from His Word (the Law)—so they couldn't plead ignorance.

E. "and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the Law" —v.18b

They prided themselves on being able to know right from wrong based on their instruction from the Law of God—

Psalm 19:7–8 (NKJV)

⁷ The law of the Lord *is* perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the Lord *is* sure, making wise the simple; ⁸ The statutes of the Lord *are* right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the Lord *is* pure, enlightening the eyes...

All of these things were rooted in their heritage—it was all part of being a Jew. This gave the Jews a tremendous sense of pride.

Paul keys in on their pride in verses 19-20:

Romans 2:19–20 (NKJV)

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.

Let's break down what he is saying to the Jewish people (primarily its religious leaders)—

1) "a guide to the blind"—v.19a

Matthew 23:24–28 (NKJV)

²⁴ Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! ²⁵ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. ²⁶ Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also. ²⁷ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead *men's* bones and all uncleanness. ²⁸ Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

- **Listen:** A classic case of the blind leading the blind.

2) "a light to those who are in darkness"—v.19b

Isaiah 42:6 (NKJV)

⁶ "I, the Lord, have called You in righteousness, And will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the Gentiles,

3) "an instructor of the foolish"—v.20a

The Jews prided themselves on the fact that no one had to teach *them* the truth of God—however, *they* needed to teach everyone else.

The Jewish people looked down on the Gentiles as foolish pagans who needed the Jewish people to instruct them out of their pagan foolishness and into the true righteousness of the Law of God.

4) “a teacher of babes”—v.20b

This is probably a reference to Gentile proselytes to Judaism. (Explain)

5) “having the form of knowledge and truth in the law”—v. 20c

The word ‘**form**’ is a Greek word we get the English word ‘*metamorphosis*’ (transformation) from.

Paul is saying that the Jewish people considered themselves to be the Law *transformed* into human flesh—the very ‘*embodiment*’ of the Law!

2 Timothy 3:5 (NKJV)

⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

This applied to the Jews of the Old Testament as well—they had a *form* of godliness, but it was a false or counterfeit appearance—they didn’t practice what they preached!

Which brings us to the second thing that gave the Jewish people a sense of security from judgment:

II. The Law—v.21-24

Romans 2:21–24 (NKJV)

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.

The second basis for their false security was in that they possessed and preached God’s Law. However, as Paul points out—possessing and preaching the Law does a person no good if they’re not going to practice it.

As one pastor put it—

“In theological terms, their preaching reflects orthodoxy (right doctrine), but their living does not reflect orthopraxy (right practice). They are much like corrupt police officials or judges, whose lives are in direct contradiction of the laws they have sworn to uphold and enforce. And because of their greater responsibility, they bring upon themselves greater punishment when they break those laws.”

Paul indicts the Jews for their hypocrisy—because they were guilty of committing the very sins they condemned the Gentiles for committing.

A. “Stealing”—v.21

Isaiah 56:11 (NKJV)

¹¹ Yes, *they are* greedy dogs *Which* never have enough. And they *are* shepherds Who cannot understand; They all look to their own way, Every one for his own gain...

Amos 8:5 (NKJV)

⁵ Saying: “When will the New Moon be past, That we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, That we may trade wheat? Making the ephah small and the shekel large, Falsifying the scales by deceit,

Malachi 3:8–9 (NKJV)

⁸ “Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. ⁹ You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, *Even* this whole nation.

B. “Adultery”—v.22

Deuteronomy 24:1–4 (NKJV)

¹ “When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts *it* in her hand, and sends her out of his house, ² when she has departed from his house, and goes and becomes another man’s *wife*, ³ if the latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts *it* in her hand, and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her as his wife, ⁴ *then* her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that *is* an abomination before the Lord, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the Lord your God is giving you *as* an inheritance.

This was a prohibition against legalized wife swapping. (Explain)

Matthew 19:3 (NKJV)

³ The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for *just* any reason?”

Matthew 5:32 (NKJV)

³² But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.

C. “You who abhor idols, do you, rob temples?”—v.22

Deuteronomy 7:25 (NKJV)

²⁵ You shall burn the carved images of their gods with fire; you shall not covet the silver or gold *that is* on them, nor take *it* for yourselves, lest you be snared by it; for it *is* an abomination to the Lord your God.

Paul is saying that they claimed to hate idolatry—but didn’t mind profiting off of it!

Romans 2:23 (NKJV)

²³ **You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law?**

Let’s stop here and make some applications from what Paul is saying—or in other words, *how does all of this speak to us?* I think that this relates to so many who have grown up in the church, who look down on those who live openly sinful and immoral lives—and yet are blind to their true standing in the eyes of God.

Many who have grown up in the church are trusting in their Christian *heritage* shield and protect them from the judgment coming upon the heathens. These are those who believe that because they live in a country with Christians roots—it means they're Christians!

Or because they have grown up in the Church, been baptized and keep holy days and church ceremonies and rituals (Roman Catholics)—they are putting their hope in these things as kind of a '*security blanket*' that will protect them from future judgment.

And in many ways, they pride themselves in the very things the Jews did.

In fact, we could very easily apply Paul's condemnation of Jewish hypocrisy to many in the Christian church (Catholics and Protestants)—

"Indeed, you call yourself a Christian. You rely on the fact that you have the Holy Scriptures. You make your boast in that you know the true God (you're not an atheist or some ignorant pagan living in some third-world country worshipping foolish idols). You come to church and hear the Word of God being taught. You know what the will of God is and mentally approve and applaud what's good and right because of what God has said in His Word..."

As a Roman Catholic we were taught that the RCC was the true church and that all of the Protestant denominations were '*playing church*' and didn't really have the truth that God had revealed to us. (Elaborate)

But all of this gives many so-called religious churchgoers a great sense of pride and superiority over the unchurched—over the irreligious and immoral people they come in contact with everyday living around them.

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower—please reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Want to know more? Click [here](#).

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