

Romans 2:17-3:8 “Religious Hypocrisy”

This morning as we continue our study through the book of Romans I need to just remind us that we are really right in the middle of a section of scripture that all goes together as really one idea and that is that all of humanity deserves the judgment of God because all of humanity has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

This section began in Romans 1:18 as Paul began to speak about how the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men and it will conclude in Romans 3:19-20 and let me just read that to you it say this¹⁹ **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.** So Paul in these verses is simply saying everyone in the whole world will be held accountable before God and that no one in the world will be justified by keeping the law.

In other words no one will be right with God because they were moral or because they did the right thing. So, all of this section is written to place all of humanity under the penalty of sin, to make it clear that none is righteous no not one.

Now if you remember last week and the week before I laid out before us that there are really three groups of people that Paul is dealing with and working to put underneath the penalty of sin and to show everyone that they need a Savior.

Two weeks ago we talked about the ungodly and if you remember they were those that denied God, that suppressed the truth, that denied the clear revelation of God in creation and because of that they were given over to all kinds of sinful behaviors including idolatry, anger, wrath, pride, disobedience to parents and sexual immorality of all kinds.

These are they which the world would say are obviously sinners and obviously people that are heading the wrong direction.

Then secondly last week we talked about those who think themselves to be moral. These are they who look at the ungodly of chapter 1 and they compare those people to themselves and they start to say that they are better than them and therefore they are right with God...And we said that many people fall into the category of thinking they are ok with God because they are basically good.

And Paul took the time to talk about how all of us have a conscience in our lives and that everyone has at some point or another violated our conscience and because of that all of us will be judged. And we spent a lot of time last week discussing that God will judge based on His standard of perfection which has been established.

So this second group needed to realize that they were in big trouble just like the first group was.

And now this week we are going to come to a third group of individuals and when they looked at the first 2 groups of people they said well this doesn't even apply to us because we are the children of Abraham, we have the promises of God, we have circumcision that we practice and

because of these things we are already good with God and have no need of a Savior.

So of course this week we are going to be talking about the Jewish mindset and really the religious Jews had the opinion that the Gentile world was really just going to be fuel for the fires of hell and that they as a nation were the special people of God...and I would say that yes there are many benefits of being Jewish, they are the chosen people of God and we'll get into this as we go through our text today but at the end of the day we will see that the Jewish person is just as guilty of sin and in need of a Savior as the rest of humanity.

So we are turning to the Jewish people this morning and I want you to just have it in your minds that the Jewish people felt that they were already right with God just based on the fact that they were the chosen people of God and they practiced circumcision and so now we'll see Paul as he is led by the Holy Spirit just obliterate the thoughts the Jewish people had.

Let's look here at verses 17-18 of Romans 2 which say the following **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,**

The Jewish people were a blessed people indeed and here Paul speaks of several things that they were blessed with...They rested on the law of God we are told and made their boast in God and they knew His will...Simply said they had the privilege of knowing God far more than anyone else did.

Think about how the Jewish children grew up as they heard the Word of God regularly beginning to memorize it from a very young age. Their whole culture revolved around the principles and teachings that were found in the Law of God. They of all people were the most near to God.

They even knew the will of God we are told meaning they knew in their hearts and their lives what God wanted and how He wanted things done. The Gentile world had Creation that spoke to them and the conscience but the Jews had the very heart of God given to them as revealed in their history and the scriptures.

They knew what they were supposed to do and they knew it not just from a distance but every minute of everyday they had access to the will of God. The reality was that the Jewish people were steeped in the knowledge of God and the will of God and everything in their culture revolved around these truths or at least it should have. For example the people had multiple festivals such as the Passover and the Feast of Booths that would remind them of the great works of God on their behalf.

Look at verses 19-20 which say ¹⁹and 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.

So because the Jewish people were so blessed and they knew that they were to be an example to the world they had a certain pride about themselves.

They knew that they were to be a guide to the blind or a light to those in darkness or an instructor of the foolish or a teacher to babes because they of all people had the knowledge of the truth that is found in the law.

The mindset of the Jew **was supposed to be** that they had the truth, **that they** knew the truth and that they were to minister these truths to the world around them...**sadly, often times rather than looking to minister to the world around them there would be a spiritual pride in the lives of the Jewish people...**Often they would sneer or look down on the Gentile world especially

I do think practically speaking that you and I as believers in Jesus have a similar responsibility **though we should be going about it in humility rather than from a** position of pride like the Jewish people who are found before us in this passage.

You and I are called in a way to allow the light of Jesus Christ to shine to the world around us aren't we? **We are ambassadors for Christ, a light to those that are blind** spiritually **an example to the world around us of what** it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

You and I should be regularly testifying to the goodness of God, looking to make disciples, looking to be a blessing, looking to share the good news of Jesus Christ...**and yet so often we fail in this don't we?**

I want you to know a few things when it comes to sharing your faith with others...First, we are commanded to go and tell the world the truth. You and I have the incredible privilege of being a part of sharing the plan of God's salvation through Jesus Christ to the world around

us. **Remaining silent is not an option**...We must use our words to tell others of the love of Jesus Christ.

Second, I want you to know that you and I are going to share the gospel differently from one person to the next...That there is no magic formula to sharing the truths of God with others...one day you may directly ask someone about their faith in Jesus or lack thereof...the next day you may simply speak of the Creation of God to someone...some of you may get into deep theological conversations with those around you and others of you may be able to say just one or two powerful sentences to those you encounter....I would say to us this morning that the position of our hearts must be in a place of submission to the Spirit of God and we should have a willingness and a desire to share with those around us.

So the Jewish people of all people should have been great witnesses of the work of God and the truth of His Word and Paul is just pointing that out to them and then look with me at verses 21-23 which say this 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?**

Well now the hammer comes down for those Jewish individuals who think of themselves so highly...There was a lot of pride in the hearts of the Jewish people and now Paul just takes the axe to the tree here and cuts them down with a series of 5 questions.

He essentially takes 5 things here and he first asks if as they teach others are they themselves doing and following what they teach...In other words Paul is saying is there hypocrisy in your life?

Have you ever met someone that spoke about Jesus like they knew a lot and threw around a lot of knowledge about the scriptures but then in the end when you watched their life they weren't practicing what they preached at all?

That was the religious leaders of the days of Jesus wasn't it? Jesus in Matthew 23 repeatedly said of the Pharisees that they were hypocrites. I would simply say Jesus does not want us as His kids to be hypocrites in our lives.

And then Paul asked them as they taught that others should not steal do they themselves steal? Probably a few reading were cringing in their hearts knowing they did this.

The third question was in regards to adultery...and the people surely taught you shouldn't engage in adultery but did they themselves do so anyways...or perhaps we could take that a little further as Jesus did and ask them if they lust after women in their hearts and minds?

The fourth question is admittedly a little hard to grab hold of and commentators in all honesty admit they don't exactly know what Paul is speaking of...When it says do you rob temples many tie this to the fact that perhaps some Jews would abstain from idol worship...but then make idols and sell them in the marketplace.

Now maybe there were some that were reading this who looked at the first 4 and they said "Hey I am doing good because I am being a good example and abstaining from all this and Paul would then give them

this 5th question saying You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking it? And so really Paul is saying to them to examine their lives and honestly ask themselves are they keeping the law and are you keeping the 10 commandments of God?

And the reality is that no one has ever done that except Jesus and so the Jewish people that Paul was writing to when they came to this last question would have to hang their heads knowing they had fallen short.

At the end of the day there is nowhere to hide from the holy and righteous standards of God. The Jewish people took great pride in the fact that they had the law of God and they were called to be a light to the world and yet they failed miserably.

And then look at verse 24 with me briefly it says ²⁴ **For “the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,” as it is written.**

Paul here says to the Jewish people that in all their failures and hypocrisy that the name of God is actually blasphemed among the Gentiles because of them...In other words you are being a poor example and since you are supposed to be a light to the world and you aren't others aren't properly seeing God the way they should.

David was actually an example of this in his life when he committed adultery and murder...when Nathan the prophet came to him and rebuked him and exposed his sin and had told David that he was forgiven he then said this in 2 Samuel 12:14 which says ¹⁴ **However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the**

enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also *who is born to you shall surely die.*

Have you ever considered that living a life of hypocrisy gives reason to those around us to deny God and to deny the power of Jesus? It surely can and does happen and this should cause us to soberly examine our lives and consider how we are choosing to live and represent our Lord.

Let me work to boil this section down into some concise thoughts about the Jewish mindset. One of the largest problems the Jewish people had in their lives was that they actually misapplied the Law of God in that they believed that keeping it made them right with God...there was a much greater reason for the law though if you just listen to the true intention of the law that is given to us in Galatians 3:19-25 which says this ¹⁹**What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator.** ²⁰**Now a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one.**

²¹**Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law.** ²²**But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.** ²³**But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed.** ²⁴**Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.** ²⁵**But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.**

The reality is that the law can never save a person, that keeping the rules can never save a person but instead the law of God or the commands of God are given to the Jewish people and to us as a tutor, to expose the sin that resides in each of us, to show us that no one can keep the law and to bring us to a point that we recognize we need a Savior.

The law brings us to Christ, we come to Jesus by faith and because of that faith in Him we are then declared right with God and after that...the law has served its purpose. So you see the law is good, it should have been kept by the Jewish people but the reality was they could never keep it and as they could not keep it they should have realized they needed a Savior and come running to Jesus the One that kept the law perfectly.

Paul was perhaps the human that came the closest to keeping the law and he talked about that as he spoke to the church in Philippi if you listen to Philippians 3:3-6 he said this which says **³For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, ⁴though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: ⁵circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; ⁶concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.**

So Paul could say that he was really an incredible human when it came to keeping the law...and then he went on in Philippians 3:7-9 to say this **⁷But what things were gain to me, these I have counted**

loss for Christ. ⁸ Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;

You see Paul had realized that no matter how much he tried to keep the law that he was still a sinner, that he still fell short, that he couldn't keep the law himself...and then he came to the end of himself and the Lord rescued Him and Paul began to say that simply knowing Jesus was far better than any accomplishment he could ever do in his life...he found that when he came to Jesus he was found to have the righteousness of Jesus and not his own and that's the whole point of what Paul is saying here to the high minded Jewish individuals that thought they were something.

Let's shift gears here in our study this morning as we come to this next section. Not only did the Jewish people have the law of God but they also had a tradition that they held that they felt made them more righteous and set apart than everyone else and that tradition was circumcision.

Circumcision was given to Abraham all the way back in Genesis 17 and really if you look at that account circumcision amongst the male descendants of Abraham was simply a sign of the agreement or covenant that God made with Abraham...Circumcision could be seen as something very similar to what we have today when we are baptized in water...To be baptized in water does not save a person but

is instead an outward public profession of an inward faith that says I have trusted in Jesus Christ.

Circumcision was to simply be an outward sign that an individual or family was a follower of the faith of Abraham and that they believed in what God had promised to them.

So the Jewish people put way too much stock in the act of circumcision thinking that because they had done this that God was automatically on their side...And sadly today some people will say that they are going to heaven or they are right with God because they have been baptized in water...If you have been baptized that's a wonderful act of faith but it does not save you nor make you right with God. Your simple faith in Jesus and what He did for you on the cross is what saves you.

So let's look at this here if you look at verse 25-27 which says 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.** ²⁶ **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?** So again here Paul brings out that if one could keep the whole law then circumcision would be of value but the reality is that none have kept the law and as such your circumcision does not save you...it is as if Paul is saying you can do all the religious acts you want but if you fail just once then its all for nothing.

When it speaks of those that fulfill the law who haven't been circumcised judging those that have the law and circumcision but no obedience its letting us know that there is something that goes beyond the outward actions and keeping of the rules.

You and I know that this is all pointing to the fact that faith trumps or is greater than the outward religious actions people go through in life and we have to keep in mind that all of this before us is like a trial that is opening up as Paul is building one point upon another to bring home the full message...We can get lost in the details and miss out on the context of what's being conveyed...Keep in mind Paul is working through all of this to show us that we need a righteousness that is not found in ourselves but instead is found in Christ.

Look at verses 28-29 which say this 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.**

Paul here points out that the outward actions and traditions are not what makes a person saved or truly of the faith of Abraham...instead Paul focuses on the inward work of the heart that needs to be done in the heart of an individual...and that real circumcision is done in the heart of a person...and a person that has had a real work of God in their heart they won't be looking for praise from men but instead God will be approving of their lives.

For an example, Jesus as He was ministering came against the Pharisees as they would actually go out on the street corners and they would make lengthy prayers all in a show of how great they were as

religious followers of God...The Lord said don't be like them but instead go into a quiet place and seek your Father in heaven.

God is far more interested in the heart of a person than He is in the outward workings of a man or woman...Yes we should live in a way that honors God as we go through life but all of that must come from the inward work of the Holy Spirit in our lives...and I might add that often times we can think someone is quite spiritual because of their actions and because they make great prayers...but God may see them very differently and the opposite is true as well as some people don't look all that spiritual on the outside but the Lord is just working mightily in their hearts.

To illustrate that listen to what the Word says over in Luke 18:9-14 which says this ⁹**Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:** ¹⁰**“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.** ¹¹**The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men— extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.** ¹²**I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’** ¹³**And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise *his* eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’** ¹⁴**I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”**

God is into blessing those who are humble in heart, those that realize they have a great need in their lives for His work and His ministry...The Jewish people often couldn't see their need for a Savior for they

thought themselves to be God's gift to the world...sadly they were often way off base and this is what Paul is trying to drive home as he spoke to them.

Listen to what Ezekiel 36:26 says about the work God desired to do in the hearts of His people it says this ²⁶ **I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.**

And then in Deuteronomy 30:6 which speaks of the work of God in the heart of a Jewish person when it says **And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.**

And Finally listen to Jeremiah 31:33 which applies to all who will come Jesus...it says ³³ **But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.** This is the work God wanted to do in His people's hearts...sadly they focused on their own righteousness and thought they could be right with God based on keeping the law and keeping the covenant of circumcision missing the whole point that the Lord was attempting to work into them.

Now let's look at a final section here in Romans 3:1-8 as it pertains to the Jews as well...keep in mind that Paul as he writes this is almost anticipating by the Spirit what people are going to think as he writes...and so now that he has really laid it out that the Jewish people are all under sin and they have just as much of a problem as the heathen does who denies God and the moral person does there is a

question that the Jewish people might come to and he addresses that in verses 1-2 if you look at that which says

What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? ² Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God. The idea here is what good does it do to be Jewish if we are all in the same basket anyways...And really this is a question that Paul easily responds to by simply saying look you have the very oracles of God...Paul also spoke to this earlier in Romans 2 that we looked at today and he will again highlight the blessings of being of Israel if you listen to Romans 9:4-5 which say this **⁴ who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; ⁵ of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.**

Of all people on earth the Jewish people received the adoption of God as His very own special chosen people the people God would display His glory through...They had the covenants of God or the agreements that He made with them, they had the law, they were the ones that served God in the temple, they had the promises of God **and of all things they were blessed to have Jesus Christ come from their nation.**

Look at verses 3-4 and we'll see a second question that gets addressed...those verses say **³ For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? 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.”**

The next question that is answered is...what if those that received the truths of God being the Jewish people chose not to believe in what God said and revealed? If they choose not to believe does that mean that God won't follow through with what He has said?

And again the answer to that is no way for God is going to be true and every man a liar...The truth is that no matter what you and I or anyone thinks about what God has said will have no sway on whether God will do what He has said or not. God WILL accomplish all that He has said whether you are with Him or not.

If you just look at the entirety of scripture you will quickly find that God is always true and right and what He says He does. Even if every man on the planet rejects God He will always be true and every man will be found false.

Just because man rejects God and His Word doesn't mean it isn't true. The Lord kept His promises to Israel...He watched over them, He judged them as He said He would, He brought about the Messiah just as He said He would...God even kept the timing of when the prophet Daniel said the Messiah would come.

God is always faithful to keep His Word regardless of how you and I choose to respond to what He says.

And then look at verses 5-8 which say

⁵ But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? /s God unjust who inflicts wrath? (I speak as a man.) ⁶ Certainly not! For then how will God judge the world?

⁷ For if the truth of God has increased through my lie to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner? 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.

There are some that are so disrespectful of God that they actually come to the point that they say that if their sinfulness only demonstrates the righteousness of God then why am I held accountable for my actions?...That's what it all boils down to in these verses.

Have you ever met someone like that? Paul will have to deal with this again over in Romans 6:1 which says **What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?** Paul responded the same way to this by saying NO WAY!

The truth is that sin will never glorify God in any way, there will never be an excuse for you continuing on in sin as you go through life. Some would look at all Paul has said in this section of scripture and they would say well if we can't do it by trying to keep the law and trying to be obedient then what's the point.

We ought never to justify our sin, we ought never look to treat our sin as if it is normal to have in our lives...Simply said you and I who are in Christ we should be looking to have the victory in our lives by His Spirit at work in us and through us.

So at the end of the day here in our study once again we come back to the simple fact that there is not one person on the planet that can be right with God based on their actions, based on their religious observances...So many people in this world will say well I'm a part of

the church or I was baptized when I was little and they think because of these things that everything is going to be just fine.

Paul is saying here to those who think this way that they too have fallen short of the glory of God, that they too will one day be held accountable for their actions and for their failures.

Perhaps today you are here and you are sitting here saying to yourself that you know that you are putting on a show in your life...that you are a hypocrite much like those that Paul was writing to...that you can talk a good game like you are good strong Christian but on the inside you know in your heart of hearts that your life is a mess...and perhaps today is a day of reckoning for you and you are saying to yourself that you need to get past the religion of your life and you need to walk in a relationship with Jesus Christ and you need to ask Him to cleanse your heart and your mind and maybe you are here today and you are saying to yourself that you need to be set free and you need to be honest with Jesus about where you are in life.

I would simply encourage you as we close in worship to just cry out to Jesus in your heart that He would help you to be real about your faith and your life...

And maybe you are here today and you are saying in your heart that you don't even know Jesus, maybe you have never received Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins...I would tell you today there is only one way to be right with God and it's by accepting Jesus Christ into your heart and turning to Him for forgiveness and choosing to walk away from the ways of this world to be near to the One that laid down His life that you could be set free.

And if today you need to receive Jesus in your heart I just urge you to go ahead and come before Jesus and just ask Him to work in you and save you and I believe He will do that and if you make that choice today just come forward after the service as I would love to pray with you.

Let's pray.

Romans 2:17-3:8 "Religious Hypocrisy"

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