

All Fall Short 3

We're Not Religious Enough

Romans 2:17-29

Memory Verses: Romans 2:29

MANUSCRIPT

Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

In The 1980s, Jim Bakker was one of the most well known and trusted Christian leaders in the world. He hosted a television show called the PTL club (Praise The Lord) which reached millions every week, and raised enormous amounts of money for the cause of Christ. Through his show, books, and sermons, he preached to the world how to live a godly life. From the outside looking in he was the picture of spiritual success. Bible in hand, a gifted speaker, millions of followers, ministry exploding. And then in a matter of moments it all fell apart like a house of cards.

It eventually came out that behind the scenes of this ministry, there was extreme amounts of financial fraud, sexual immorality, lies and manipulation. The most religious man in America had been living a double life. Unfortunately, the fallout didn't just destroy the man himself or his ministry, it shook a nation's faith to the core. Many walked away from Christianity altogether, not because of sin, but because of religious hypocrisy.

Here's the uncomfortable truth. The facade of true religion does more harm to the cause of Christ than perhaps anything else. When we pretend to be all in for God, but reveal ourselves to be hypocrites, we turn people away from Christ. There's a Brennan Manning quote that was made famous on DC Talk's CD Jesus Freak, and I would hear it over and over again. I mean, in the 90's, I flat-out wore that CD out. But the quote said this, "The greatest single cause of atheism in the world today is Christians, who acknowledge Jesus with their lips, walk out the door, and deny Him by their lifestyle. That is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable."

Paul knows this. That's why in Romans 2 he turns from obvious sinners to respectable religious people and says, in effect: "You may look perfectly religious, but you're not safe."

We are in a series called "All Fall Short." And we are trying to answer the questions "why do we fall short," and "what do we do about it?" So far we've discovered two things. We fall short because we've all rejected God in our hearts and minds. It's our nature. We would rather worship created things than a creator. We would rather chase our perverted desires than submit to the designer. We reject him. And we fall short because we've no good excuses. We think maybe because I

know God and know his rules I'll be good. Wrong. We think maybe because we have a good lineage or have some morality we'll be good. Wrong again. You see, God sees our hearts and knows we are evil. We can't hide it from him... and so, as **Romans 3:23** says, we have fallen short of the glory of God. Rebellion won't save you. Morality won't save you. And today we will see that... Religion won't save you either.

This passage matters a great deal to me. Why? Because I'm a pastor. I represent the religious establishment. And whether I like it or not, I stand in the place of Jim Bakker. I have a huge responsibility to represent Christ without blaspheming his image or defaming his name. But just because I'm a pastor... it doesn't mean I'm safe.

And this passage should matter a great deal to you. Why? Because you are in church. You stand in the religious establishment. And what we represent in here had better look the same out there. Just because you are a church member, covenant partner, or church going person... doesn't mean you are safe.

Listen, I get it. It's very easy to assume we are good with God simply because we know scripture, attend regularly, say yes to the right things, say no to the wrong things, and look the part. But today Paul is about to wreck some of our worlds... today he says this: **"you can be very religious and at the same time, completely lost."** Let's look at our passage today in **Romans 2:17-29**. According to this the religious person relies on the law, boasts in knowing God, teaches others, and even has the outward marks of the faith... but religion can't save you. The main point is this... **Religion can make you look right, but only Jesus can make you righteous!** Today, I want to quickly give you two reasons why religion can't save you.

Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

First, look with me again at verses **2:17-20**. Clearly Paul is speaking to church going people. These are Christians who take their religion very seriously and who also feel that they represent the Church of Christ. They know the Bible and rely upon it as their standard of truth. Awesome. They boast in God, speak about God, would never speak against God. Excellent. Some of them even feel that they are qualified to teach others about God and are leading them to follow Christ more closely. This is right on.

For the most part... Paul is describing us. Christians with a high confidence in our religious state. And what Paul is getting at is... you think because of this that you are good with God. You think you've arrived. You've done all that you need to do. You are sanctified. But you are sorely mistaken. Why? **Because God is not impressed by what you say or how you act if your life contradicts it.** Meaning this... if you treat religion like a role in a play, that stops and starts when the curtain goes up or down, you are just an actor and the real you is merely a hypocrite.. a fake.

The first reason religion can't save you is this **Religion Can't**

Save You Because There Is No Substitute For Sanctification. Look at what verses 21-23 say again. You can teach others the truth, but do you teach yourself? You can preach against stealing but do you steal? You can tell others to abstain from sexual sin, but do you? You can act self-righteous, but do you worship idols like money, possessions, prestige, and popularity? His point is simple... there are a lot of people who claim to be strong in their faith, who present a form of godliness, who represent their religion well... and they look down their noses at all of the sinners, the democrats, the abortionists, the homosexuals, etc... and while they are looking down their noses at these people... they themselves are completely filled with evil thoughts, sinful urges, and self-justified debauchery! The way you present yourself publicly doesn't cover who you are privately. Not with God. Not with a God who sees you at all times in all situations. He knows you intimately. He sees your deeds and knows your thoughts. You cannot hide from him. He knows exactly who you are!

We have way too much scripture to cover this, but let me give you two passages that you may be familiar with. The first, 1 Samuel 16:7. Samuel the prophet is looking for the next King of Israel and he knows its one of Jesse's sons. One by one Jesse's sons are paraded in front of him and each one is tall, strong, and good looking. Surely these are kings. But one by one God says nope... next. Eventually Samuel runs out of choices and says to Jesse... is there no one else? Jesse reluctantly mentions, "yes, there is one more, but he's just a little shepherd boy." Samuel sends for him and God tells him that this is the one. And in this verse God reminds the prophet... I look at what's inside the heart... not the exterior. The second passage is in Matthew 23:25-28 where Jesus directly confronts the religious elite in their hypocrisy. The point is clear... If you flaunt your religion but actually live contrary to it... you are a white washed tomb full of dead bones. You are not clean.. you are not new... you are not sanctified.

And lastly look at verse 24. What's the result of religious hypocrisy? God is defamed and ridiculed and the kingdom is harmed. Get this... religion doesn't just fail to save... it can actually push others away from God. It may sound a little harsh... but if you are using your religion as a substitute for your sanctification... you are doing more harm to the kingdom of God than if you weren't a Christian at all. **Religion can make you look right, but only Jesus can make you righteous!**

Now, the second thing... look with me at verses 2:25-29. Paul is hitting on the number one religious symbol of Jewish identity; circumcision. Male babies, in our culture, for the most part, are circumcized soon after they are born. It is simply a medical procedure of removing the foreskin from their genitals. For the Jewish people in ancient times, they would either

do this to their boys on the eighth day in a ceremony, or when someone converted to the Jewish religion. It was commanded by God to Abraham to symbolize the cutting off of old life and old sin and old ways and having a new life in God.

It was the sign of the covenant of God with his people, the Israelites. It was a badge of belonging. It was a source of religious security. And I'm sure you can already see the possible problem. Though it was a symbol of an inward change... a sign of something greater... it became the thing itself. To be a part of the religion, you didn't need to really change... you just needed to have the sign.

The second reason religion can't save you is **Religion Can't Save You Because There Is No Sacrament For Salvation.** In other words... there is no symbol or sign, no action or oath or tattoo or baptism or prayer or signature or ceremony that makes you an adopted child of God. It doesn't work like that! Why? Well Paul tells us... if you have the sign but reject the obedience and the relationship that the sign symbolizes... the sign means nothing! At that point the sign becomes a curse. **External symbols can never replace internal transformation.**

You say Shevi, well what about Communion and Baptism? We do those sacraments all the time. We talk about symbols of our faith all the time. Yes, absolutely. God takes his symbols seriously and so should we. If God says to continue to do something which symbolizes our faith...we will give it the honor and respect it deserves. But we will also recognize that those acts, ceremonies, and symbols, don't save us. They are acts of worship to praise God for what he has already done. But we know that the sacraments aren't actually doing it. We celebrate because we are saved... not the other way around. The problem with the religious Jews in the church at Rome were simple... they thought they were saved because of circumcision... and Paul is reminding them... their sacrament doesn't mean squat if they don't live for Christ!

Paul isn't rejecting the sacraments, he's rejecting confidence in them for salvation. Listen to me and listen clearly. Baptism doesn't save you. Communion doesn't save you. Church attendance doesn't save you. Confession doesn't save you. Tithing doesn't save you. Giving to the poor doesn't save you. Wearing a cross doesn't save you. Having an experience doesn't save you. Circumcision is a matter of the heart. Meaning... **Putting your faith in Christ is the only thing that can save you! Religion can make you look right, but only Jesus can make you righteous!**

Application

There's a story of a man was arrested at an international airport trying to board a flight using a perfectly forged passport. It had the right cover. The right seals. The right stamps. To the naked eye it was flawless. But when it was scanned, the internal code didn't match the issuing

authority. The officer didn't argue about how convincing it looked. He didn't care how much effort went into it. He didn't even question the man's sincerity. One issue settled everything: "This wasn't issued by us." The passport wasn't rejected because it looked bad, it was rejected because it was never authorized.

Conclusion

Paul's warning in Romans 2 is exactly that. Religion can look real. It can sound right. It can pass casual inspection. But when your life is scanned by a holy God, the question won't be: Did you know the language? Did you carry the symbols? Did you look the part? It will be one question only: Was your heart changed by Me? Listen, religion can inform you... Jesus can transform you. Religion can mark you... Jesus can make you. Religion can serve you... only Jesus can save you. **Religion can make you look right, but only Jesus can make you righteous!**