

Romans 2:17-29
“Like God, Like People?”

- I. Intro**
- II. Vs. 17-20 Right advantages, wrong conclusions**
- III. Vs. 21-24 Are you like the God you profess?**
- IV. Vs. 25-29 The Peril of presumption**

I. Intro

In verse 11 Paul wrote to the moralist that *with God there is no respecter of persons*, but the religious Jew would be thinking, “*That is true with moral and immoral Gentiles but not when compared with religious Jews!*” So, in verses 17-29 Paul outlines for his readers that this statement is true for all people, even religious people. The Jews were convinced that God had given them special favor based upon three things:

- National descent from Abraham
- The outward sign of circumcision
- The Word of God

Yet that very Word said in Deut. 7:7 that, “*The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples*”.

Paul argues that what makes a person a child of God isn't national origin, a mark on their flesh or a book in their library instead it is a matter of personal transformation in the heart by

simply trusting in Jesus. The fact was that most Jews were despised by Gentiles as they had received extraordinary privileges from the Roman Government that no other people group enjoyed which further infuriated most gentiles.

- *They were allowed to transport the temple tax every year to Jerusalem which was forbidden by every other occupied country*

- *They were allowed to have their own courts and live according to their own laws*
- *They were allowed to continue the practice the Sabbath and not work but still receive compensation*
- *They were exempt from being forced to join the Roman army*

These special compensations fueled the world's hatred, but it wasn't the only reason. What bothered the gentiles the most was the Jews contempt and hatred for all people that were not Jews. In Isaiah 49:6 God says that He had given Israel "*as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.*" **No person can be missionary to a group of people whom they have contempt for.** If asked directions, the Jew's wouldn't respond except to another Jew! If someone was thirsty they wouldn't give them a drink of water. If a fly landed on them they would go through ceremonial washing not because of the fly but because it may have landed upon a Gentile. **We need to learn that God's promises are not a matter of pedigree, but a matter of character transformed by God.**

II. Vs. 17-20 Right advantages, wrong conclusions

Vs. 17-18 Paul starts out with the claim then its privileges:

- a. They were proud of their name "*Jew*" which comes from Judah and means "*praise*", but **they interpreted that they were those who were to be praised!**
 - b. Second they were proud of 5 privileges which caused them to boast, and Paul points out that **with special privileges come special responsibilities.** He lists five advantages the Jews of his day had in their position before God.
1. Vs. 17a *They rejoiced in having the law*: The Jewish people of Paul's day were proud of the fact that God gave His holy law. ***They believed this confirmed their status as a specially***

chosen people, and thus insured their salvation. There are a great many today who also boast that they have the Bible and good teaching available to them, some even boast in the translation they use.

2. Vs. 17b *They boasted in their relationship to God:* They felt that they had an inside track to God. Every now and again you hear people boast that because of a specific doctrine or an affiliation with a particular group that they have a special standing with God, that only those who share their truth can boast of.
3. Vs. 18a *They knew the will of God:* They not only had the scriptures they had the prophets and direct revelation of God and what was on His heart. There are those today that think that they have special insight through God's word or an in house profit that other's don't have.
4. Vs. 19 *They took pride in morally superiority:* They had a list and checked it twice and didn't hang out with those who were naughty and not nice. Many in the church today take pride in the things they don't do and believe that God is impressed as well. "*We don't dance, we don't play cards, and we don't go to the movies.*"
5. Vs. 20 *They saw themselves as instructors of the foolish:* They could quote whole books and sections of the Bible from memory and felt that this qualified them to instruct those who were childish.

These qualities became a source of identity which led them into the false thinking that those 5 privileges which led them to make 4 conclusions that they believed to be true about themselves.

- a. Vs. 19a *They were guides to the blind:* Because of their unique standing with God, they were given the right to correct those around them. They needed to ***inform*** the unfortunates who either because of the lack of advantage or stupidity needed to be guided.

- b. Vs. 19b *They were a light to those who were in darkness*: They saw themselves as the ***illumination*** to all who dwelt in darkness, the expert that would bring the needed clarity to all who stumbled around in the night.
- c. Vs. 20a *They were the instructor of the foolish*: They were ***the moral and ethical police*** that needed to be on patrol 24/7 to set right those who were behaving beneath their standards.
- d. Vs. 20b *They were the teachers of babes*: Their egos were so large that they thought themselves as ***the mentors*** for those who didn't share their insight.

They were outwardly correct but inwardly arrogant full of pride which led them to be boastful and bitter.

III. Vs. 21-24 Are you like the God you profess?

Vs. 21-24 The Jews were notorious in the Roman empire of being overly shrewd in business dealings taking advantage of people to make a buck, yet they never considered that stealing. They also weren't too strict on a little hanky-panky with slave girls that they dealt with, all the while condemning adultery. They had no problem doing business with pagan temples even though they denounced the idols worshipped there.

It all comes down to practice above possession, "*If you have the law, do you keep it?*" Judaism in Paul's day interpreted the law so that they thought they were able to keep it. Yet in Matt. 5:19-48 Jesus exposed the error of such interpretations. God will hold us accountable for both motives and actions. In Amos 3:2 the prophet writes "*You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore, I will punish you for all your iniquities.*" **The truth is with greater privilege comes greater responsibility.**

There is nothing more repugnant than a person who is boastful of their religion yet in their actions and attitudes discredit the very religion they profess! That's the problem with self-righteousness; it gives the skeptic and the cynic reasons to not listen and obey the truth of the God's word. There are folks who take an exact record of how many THEY win to Jesus, but they take no record of how many THEY have driven away. "Like God, like people, like people like God!" Oh, dear ones that very statement ought to cause us to reexamine our concept of our relationship with God.

IV. Vs. 25-29 The Peril of presumption

Vs. 25-27 Circumcision was:

- a. An identification of God's covenant people, an outward sign of an inward reality.
- b. An illustration of how God dealt with our old nature, the flesh which is clarified in the O.T.
 - 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

God's people were to cut away the areas of their lives so that they would "**speak tenderly**" "**listen with compassion**" and "**act with brokenness and humility**" and they fell into the illusion that because they were circumcised outwardly that this was what God wanted. **Outward expression means nothing if it isn't accompanied by inward experience.** The Christian church need only substitute *baptism, confirmation, or church membership* to immolate the same pride as they rest upon those things as a sign that they belong to God. But Paul says that these things are worthless unless something has happened that changed the heart. It isn't a matter if you were

baptized, galvanized, or pasteurized it is only a matter if you have only trusted in Jesus' finished work on the cross on your behalf!!!!

Vs. 28-29 Finally Paul says that their religion is worthless if it doesn't hold to the reality that God intended. Religious folks have two dangers:

1. **The Peril of Presumption**: Nothing is easier than self-righteousness and self-deception. **The greater the knowledge, the greater the danger in being content with information without transformation!!! Without transformed hearts we may well become occupied with Christian work, Christian people, and Christian terminology all the while never encountering the new transformed life that comes from the Spirit of God.** Jesus said in Matthew 7:22-23 "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?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" **The greater the privilege the greater the peril, the higher the delight the more imperative the duty!**
2. **The Peril of Formalism**: The lesson from circumcision is that the religious seal and the spiritual reality are separable. Circumcision, baptism, church attendance etc. is just an outward sign and no guarantee of an inward reality. **Just because a person has participated in applying the sign doesn't mean that what the sign was meant to signify is being applied! To trust in the sign of circumcision all the while not living a circumcised life was the height of hypocrisy. The word of God profits no one when it is only honored on a shelf and not lived out in a life! God sees reality and recognizes it as righteousness; people see outward ritual and recognize it as righteousness!**

The last verse contains a pun “*The praise of such a man comes not from men but from God*”. In the Greek the word “*praise*” is taken from the Hebrew word for praise which is “*Judah*”. Paul is saying two things by the use of this pun:

1. That the “*praise*” of such a man comes not from men but from God
2. That the “*Jewishness*” of such a man comes not from men but from God