

Romans

Bible Study

Condemnation of the Jews

Romans 2:17—24

After showing how all of mankind is devoid of any good in Romans chapter 1, Paul logically continues in chapter 2 showing how God will judge those who have gone their own way. The first sixteen verses show that God will judge all the who are self righteous. These people are more than willing to point out the faults of others while ignoring their own faults. Although Romans 1 has already demonstrated that all men are lacking spiritually, these unbelievers reject any condemnation, and instead direct judgment to others with the same problem.

God is transparent in telling us that He will be the judge of all mankind. Believers will be judged for reward (Romans 14:10; 1 Corinthians 3:10—15) while the unbeliever will be judged to see if they are worthy of eternal life (Revelation 20:12). God will give each unbeliever a completely unbiased and fair assessment (Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11; Galatians 2:6; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25). Part of that judgment will be to determine what punishment they deserve. Those who are relatively innocent of wrong doing will be treated much less severely than those who are evil. God will judge in truth (Romans 2:2), impartially (Romans 2:11) and in accordance with Paul's gospel (Romans 2:16). Unbelievers will be evaluated according to how much "light" was given during their life (Romans 2:4—5), according to their deeds (Romans 2:6), and according to their built-in conscience (Romans 2:13—15).

How wonderful to know that believers will not fall under God's condemnation, or under His judgment concerning our salvation. Praise the Lord that we who are in Christ are not under God's condemnation. Jesus Christ has paid the penalty for our sin so we find ourselves declared not guilty. Jesus Christ has taken our sins upon Himself, and in return he has imputed His righteousness (Romans 3:21—22; 2 Corinthians 5:21). It's important to note that just as Jesus Christ did not become a sinner when my sin was imputed upon Him, I did not become righteous when He declared I was. Even though I was declared "not guilty," I had still sinned. When God looks at me, he sees the Son. Being baptized into Christ identifies me completely with Him. It is as if I have died with Him, was buried with Him and have already risen from the dead with Him (Romans 6:1—11; Colossians 2:12; 3:1—4).

The self-righteous Jew (2:17—29)

Paul narrows his focus, turning from all mankind to the self-righteous Jew. Man, in general, is self-righteous, as Paul pointed out in verses 1—16. Jews were shown to be self-righteous in some specific areas. Paul was well aware of their self righteousness because he was a Pharisee, who were well known to be self righteous. In Matthew 23, Jesus calls out the Pharisees for their self righteousness and hypocrisy. Everything they did, they did to make themselves look good on the outside, all the while they were rotting on the inside (Matthew 23:25, 27). They were said to already have their reward through the praise and glory given to them by the people (Matthew 6:1—2, 5, 16). In contrast, Jesus taught that those in Israel who are seeking things from above will receive their reward from the Father in the future when the Millennial Kingdom is instituted (Matthew 6:4, 6, 18).

Misplaced trust (verses 17—18)

God had formed Israel to be the nation through whom He would reveal Himself to the world (Deuteronomy 7:6—8). Israel was exclusively given the adoption, the glory (Exodus 40:34), the covenants (Abrahamic: Genesis 17:2—7; Mosaic: Deuteronomy 11; Palestinian: Deuteronomy 30:1—10; Davidic: 2 Samuel 7:8—16; New: Jeremiah 31:31—34), the giving of the Law (Romans 9:4; Deuteronomy 4:13—49), the services of God (Deuteronomy 10:12; Ezekiel 20:40; Isaiah 44:21) and the promises (Romans 9:4). It's through Israel that we have God's word, the Bible, and Jesus Christ.

Although they considered themselves highly blessed to be chosen as a servant of God, Israel turned from God and worked to develop their own righteousness. Instead of being a humble servant of God, they became proud that God chose them to do His work. The leaders of Israel even made up their own laws and traditions that put the people under their thumb. They took on the role of God, desiring the people to worship them instead of God. They abused their powers and used the people of Israel for their own gain. Instead of strengthening Israel, the leaders left Israel spiritually desolate. Instead of pointing them to Jesus Christ, they turned them away from Him (Jeremiah 23:1—4; Ezekiel 34:1—10).

These religious leaders were trusted by the masses within Israel. These leaders were proud of being given the Law, but used it to control the people. They were boasting in how godly they were, but they were merely whitewashed tombs, holy and pious on the outside, but evil on the inside. They built themselves up as being discerners of the Law and of God's will, but were ignorant of even the simplest concepts (Matthew 12:3—5; Matthew 22:29—32). These Jewish leaders put their trust in performing good works to cover the evil impulses of their inner man.

Exerting control (verses 19—20)

The religious leaders were able to exert control over the people because of their elevated position. God set up the priesthood and put them in charge of the people (Matthew 23:2), however, they abused their power and authority. They presented themselves as guides for the blind when they were actually the blind ones (Matthew 23:16, 24). They thought of themselves as a light to the nation of Israel when in fact, they were in complete darkness (Matthew 4:16). The Light given to Israel came in the Person of Jesus Christ (John 1:1—5). This Light was not understood by the leaders of Israel because they were not spiritually minded. The religious leaders wanted to be the light to Israel, and therefore they needed to get rid of Jesus because the people began following Him instead of them (Matthew 12:14; Mark 11:18; 15:10).

They were also to be the teachers of Israel, using their knowledge of Scripture to point the people to God. When Jesus came to earth, they were to use this knowledge to point the people to Him as their Messiah. Unfortunately, they were clueless about what Scripture really meant, and only used it to put the people under their thumbs. Their failure to be good spiritual leaders of Israel was clearly pointed out by Jesus to the people when He accused them of blocking the pathway into the Kingdom (Matthew 23:13).

Hypocrites (verses 21—24)

Their hypocrisy was evident in that they taught in ignorance. They preached that stealing was wrong while at the same time they were stealing from the temple (Matthew 23:25). They would teach adultery was wrong, but they were guilty of adultery. This was, I believe, a spiritual reference. Adultery in Scripture refers to Israel serving other gods (Jeremiah 3:8—9; 7:9; Ezekiel 23:37). These religious leaders had turned from the true God and led, or at least allowed, Israel to serve idols. This is why Matthew 4:16 characterizes the time of Jesus' birth as a time of great darkness (Luke 1:79). The woman accused of adultery in John 8 was a picture of Israel caught serving other gods and then being forgiven. The accusers were the leaders of Israel who were said to be guilty of the same crime. They had all "cheated" on the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Finally, although they outwardly upheld the Law, they were actually guilty of breaking the Law. They would use the Law to their advantage and against the people (Matthew 23:23).

It was because of their actions that Israel, and God, was blasphemed among the Gentiles. Instead of being a light to the world, they made God a curse. Their insincerity was obvious to all.

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