

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR THE WEEK OF APRIL 28 - MAY 4

Message Title: THE DANGERS OF RELIGION

Message Text: ROMANS 2:17-29

Before Your Small Group Meeting:

- Watch Pastor Mark's Message
- Read Romans 2:17-29

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is one thing that challenged you from the message this week?
2. Pastor Mark shared 4 mistakes religious people make; they become braggers, bashers, blind, or bitter. What mistake do you make most often? Explain.
3. Read 2 Corinthians 12:9-10. How have you boasted in your weakness so that Christ's power will rest on you?
4. Which of the 5 healthy heart habits do you need to focus on this week and what will you do to help them become regular rhythms in your life?
 1. Regularly self-check the pulse of my heart.
 2. Give up the gavel to God.
 3. Brag on God and God's people all the time.
 4. See myself as God's partner in lifting people out of pits.
 5. Seek the praise of God over the praise of people.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Commentary on Romans 2:17-29

An accounting paradigm seemed a natural one within which to analyze Paul's words concerning Jewish accountability before God. After all, one can almost hear them say, "How do you figure that, Paul?!" He moves back into the diatribe format (begun in 2:1) in order to engage a fictional, self-righteous Jewish questioner. Do not forget—Paul had been a self-righteous Jew himself (Phil. 3:4-6). He knows *exactly* how they think, and focuses in immediately on the assets and liabilities of their position.

2:17-20. The positive side of the Jewish ledger was strong. Paul lists eight advantages to being a Jew—eight "boasts" by which they thought God's judgment of them would not be as harsh as the Gentiles:

Verse 17:

1. They were the Jews! They were God's chosen people, his *only* chosen people, the "apple of his eye" (Zech. 2:8). This must count for something!
2. They **rely on the law**. Had God chosen any other people to reveal his will to at Sinai? Their religious reverence for the law betrayed the hope they put in their possession of it.
3. They **brag** about their **relationship to God**. Different from idols of wood and stone, Israel's God was their Father (Isa. 63:16; Mic. 3:11).

Verse 18:

4. They **know his will**. Israel could, it is true, say that they knew the will of God. They were the only ones with special revelation from him (Exod. 4:22).
5. They **approve of what is superior**. Dietary laws, lifestyle restrictions, worship instructions—the Jews had a narrower view of life than their neighbors; a view they deemed superior (Gal. 1:14).
6. They are **instructed by the law**. Psalm 119 extols the merits of God's decrees as those which direct the steps of man. The Jews relished God's instructions (so much so that they made up hundreds of decrees to go along with his, eventually preferring theirs over his; see Matt. 23).

Verses 19-20:

7. They are convinced they **are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants**. Indeed, they were called by God to be such to the nations of the world (Isa. 42:6; 49:6).
8. They **have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth** (see Ps. 19:7-9).

It is understandable, while not excusable, how Israel could be tempted to think of themselves as better than the rest of humanity. In terms of privilege and possession, they did have a chosen place. In terms of practice, however, they failed as frequently as the Gentiles. In that fact is found the Jewish liabilities.

2:21-24. Jewish liabilities can be outlined as cleanly as their assets by just imagining the opposites. That is, the behavior their privileged position should have produced was not how they lived. Paul calls them to account for the discrepancy:

- They taught others, but did not teach themselves.

- They preached against stealing, yet stole.
- They preached against adultery, but committed adultery.
- They abhorred idols, but stole from pagan temples.
- They bragged about the law, yet dishonored God by breaking it.

The upshot of their behavior was the most terrible of results: **God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.** While not a direct quote, Paul builds this statement on two references (Isa. 52:5; Ezek. 36:22) from the most terrible period in Israel's history, the exile and captivity of her people. The name of God that was so holy to the Jews that they would not even pronounce it was being dragged through the dirty streets of the pagan world like a bad joke. "All day long my name is constantly blasphemed," the Lord said through Isaiah (52:5). Three different times, Ezekiel recounts, God had not judged Israel when they came out of Egypt to keep his name from being profaned in the eyes of the nation (Ezek. 20:9, 14, 22). Though they deserved judgment, he withheld it and patiently tried to teach them his ways so that the surrounding nations would not ridicule his name because of his people. Finally, however, his patience ran out, and he sent the nation into exile—which caused his name to be blasphemed (Ezek. 36:20-21).

But then, to redeem the glory of his name, God prophesied through Ezekiel that he would judge the nations that captured Israel, but not for Israel's sake—"for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone" (Ezek. 36:22). But then note God's ultimate, missionary purpose in judging Israel's oppressors: "I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. *Then the nations will know that I am the LORD. declares the Sovereign LORD, when I show myself holy through you before their eyes*" (Ezek. 36:23; emphasis added).

For God, for Ezekiel, and now for Paul, there was a missionary purpose in keeping the name of God holy—that the nations will know that *Yahweh, Israel's God, is the LORD!* Do not miss the significance of this for the Jewish believers in Rome: "Yes," Paul is saying to the Jews, "the Gentiles have sinned and deserve God's judgment. But from Abraham on it has been my purpose to use you to save the Gentiles from their sins. But *your* sins are so blatant that the Gentiles laugh at my name! How can I ever redeem them when it is you who need redemption! Your sins are as judgment-worthy as theirs. No, yours are *more* worthy of judgment than theirs, because you are supposed to be their light. And when you allow your light to go out, how great is the darkness in which they remain!"

The late theologian-apologist Francis Schaeffer saw a worrisome connection between Paul's words to the Jews and the contemporary American church:

Again we must admit, this is surely how God looks at much of Christendom today. Claiming to be under the umbrella of Christendom, claiming to have some sort of special blessing because the bells ring in the cathedrals, because in the United States great numbers of people go to church, and yet we commit blasphemy against God as we turn from the clear teaching of His Word. It is a sober truth and we must face it: if we have the Bible, if we enjoy all the blessings it brings, and yet by our lives bring shame upon God's name, we are guilty of the greatest irreverence.... When the man with the Bible treats it as an external thing only, it causes the man without the Bible to dishonor the God of the Bible. Surely, then, the man with the Bible is justifiably under God's wrath" (Schaeffer, p. 61).

2:25-27. Paul now reveals in the simplest of terms the true profit in being a Jew: **observe the law**. Paul had already written to Galatian proselytes that “every man who lets himself be circumcised ... is obligated to obey the whole law” (Gal. 5:3). This was, of course, not a surprise, if not a reality. Circumcision was the “sign of the covenant” (Gen. 17:11) between Abraham, and his descendants, and God. As the participants cut off their foreskin, so were they admitting willingness to be cut off from God should they fail to meet the stipulations of the covenant. Israel’s failure throughout her generations was to substitute the “sign of the covenant” with the keeping of the stipulations—obedience to the law. Indeed, God warned through Jeremiah that being circumcised in the flesh, as many of Israel’s neighbors were, would protect no one from judgment—including his own people Israel (Jer. 9:25–26).

Therefore, **circumcision has value if you observe the law**. But if you have been physically circumcised, yet fail to keep the law, **you have become as though you had not been circumcised**. So critical is the observance of the law that the Gentiles (those **not circumcised physically**) who **[obey] the law** will condemn the Jews who, though circumcised physically, are lawbreakers! True spiritual profit, in God’s eyes, is found in obedience to him. Assets of access to God are canceled by liabilities of license with God’s words. There is profit only in obedience. If these implications and hints have not been sufficient to make Paul’s points, his next words will go straight to the bottom line.

2:28-29. A true Jew cannot be determined by line of sight—it is not a matter of externalities. **A man is a Jew if he is one inwardly**. This also was not new, if not forgotten. From the time of the choosing of Israel’s second king (the first one who followed after God’s own heart), God has looked differently than man looks. When Samuel saw Jesse’s son Eliab, he thought, “Surely the LORD’S anointed stands here before the LORD” (1 Sam. 16:6). What did Samuel see that made him think Eliab was to be the new king? Apparently not what God was looking for: “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (16:7).

And in Jesus’ day, the Jews were still living life externally: “Everything they do is done for men to see” (Matt. 23:5; emphasis added). From banquet and synagogue seats to the size of phylacteries and tassels to being noted and greeted as “Rabbi” in the marketplace, the Jews lived large on the outside but small on the inside (see Matt. 23:5–7). Unfortunately for them, the inside is where God looks.

Four things, Paul says, will allow us to recognize a true Jew in God’s sight:

1. He does not emphasize outward and external signs (v. 28).
2. His heart has been circumcised (revealed before God) (v. 29).
3. The Spirit’s knife (“the word of God”; Heb. 4:12) has performed the circumcision on the heart (v. 29).
4. God’s praise drowns out the “praise” of men (v. 29).

Continuing the diatribe format which he began in 2:1, Paul now moves to raise and answer the objections which he knew would flow from his Jewish readers in Rome. After all, he has just dismantled the superstructure of Jewish religion—in the name of the gospel.¹

¹ Boa, K., & Kruidenier, W. (2000). [Romans](#) (Vol. 6, pp. 81–85). Broadman & Holman Publishers.