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Sermon Notes

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Who Is the True Jew?

Romans 2:17-29

I. Review

- A. The Gospel of God: Power for Complete Salvation; KEY: “The Righteousness of God.”
- B. The Wrath of God: God’s Passionate Response to Evil
- C. The Central issue: Exchanging the Glory of God for an Image... Result, 21 Evils
- D. Warning Against Hypocrisy, Contempt for Patience of God... storing up wrath for the day of wrath
- E. Judgment Day: “judgment according to deeds”... eternal life OR eternal wrath, without partiality
- F. Last week: all humanity has the law of God in their hearts... so Jews don’t have unfair advantage

II. Paul’s Purposes

- A. To show what sin is: trading the glory of God for something else
- B. To show universality of sin (1:18-3:20)
 - 1. 1:18-32 Gentile idolatry... exchange glory of God for images
 - 2. 2:1-29 Jewish disobedience... robbing God of His glory by disobeying Him

1:23 [Gentiles] exchange the glory of the immortal God for images

+2:23 [Jews] strip God of His glory by breaking the Law

3:23 [Everyone] “All have sinned and lack the glory of God”

- C. To point to true salvation: replacement of glory of God back to the center of the human heart

Paul must strip Jews of self-confidence... or they’ll never seek grace in Christ

- D. Paul’s Deep Concern for His People

- 1. No anti-semitism here

- a. hideous history of racism against Jews
- b. so-called “Christians” have taken part in this too
- c. ludicrous

John 4:22 “...salvation is from the Jews”

The salvation covenant comes to us in a Jewish context, Jesus was Jewish, the apostles were all Jewish... to be saved, we must truly become children of Abraham

- 2. Paul’s courageous passion
 - a. passion stated

Romans 9:1-4 [willing to trade his own salvation & be sent to hell for Jews]

- b. passion displayed with incredible courage

In city after city, Paul preached first in Jewish synagogues... “to the Jew first!”

- 3. Paul’s deep concern to warn of dangers
 - a. hypocrisy: of preaching one thing and practicing another
 - b. formalism: of honoring God with the lips but not with the heart
 - c. self-righteous superiority: You need me, but I need nothing!! I am a child of Abraham

III. False confidence #1: The Law and Jewish Identity (vs. 17-24)

A. A Reputation as a Jew: The Chosen People of God

vs. 17 “Now you, if you call yourself a Jew...”

- 1. Self-identity: we are the people of God... “I am a Jew”
- 2. Boastfulness about God

vs. 17 “... you brag about your relationship to God”

- a. lit. “boast about God”
- b. ordinarily a good thing

1 Corinthians 1:31 “Therefore, as it written, let him who boasts boast in the Lord.”

- c. BUT the boasting is in God’s grace in Christ... the Jews felt no need for that

3. God's Redemptive History: They WERE the people called by God's name

Deuteronomy 28:10 “Then all the peoples on earth will see that you are called by the name of the Lord and they will fear you.”

- a. God intended the Jews to bear God's name to the ends of the earth
- b. BUT they dishonored God and caused Gentiles to blaspheme God's name!!

B. Resting on the Law

vs. 17 “...if you rely on the law...”

1. lit. “If you rest upon the law”... “take comfort in”, “find rest in”
2. BUT law is relentless... meant to drive us to God for mercy... it promotes UNREST

Galatians 3:10 “All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.’”

[Peter at council] Acts 15:10 [...called the Law] “a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear”

3. True rest NOT FOUND IN THE LAW... but in Christ alone

Matthew 11:28-30 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

BUT Jews found their rest in simply possessing the Law... “God spoke to Moses, Moses spoke to us, we are safe as God's people... we rest in the Law!”

C. Positive effects of the Law

vs. 18 “because you are instructed by the law...”

1. lit. “catecheo” “Catechized out of the law”... systematic instruction from Law
2. Positive effects of the Law
 - a. know his will (vs. 18)... God's will made clear in the Law
 - b. “approve of what is superior”... transformed mind, approves of what is excellent
3. Very different than Gentile darkness of Romans 1:28

1:28 “Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind...”

- a. lit. mind disapproved of God, of what was MOST EXCELLENT
- b. JEWS however, have a mind instructed by the law... THEY DO APPROVE OF WHAT IS EXCELLENT

However, Jewish knowing of God’s will and approving of what is excellent did not carry them far enough... they knew the right things, but didn’t do them!

D. Negative Result: Self-righteous self-confidence

vs. 19 “...if you convince yourself that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in darkness, and instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants...”

- 1. Nothing wrong with the Law

vs. 20 “because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth...”

- 2. Jews missed the whole point... self-deceived
 - a. “you convince yourself that you are...” all these lofty things
 - b. law doesn’t give them permission to boast over others
- 3. Four-fold arrogance

guide for the blind...light for those in the darkness... corrector for the foolish... teacher for infants

Gentiles & Jewish “mob” were “the blind, those in darkness, the fools, the infants”
 Jewish teachers of the law: guides, light, correctors, teachers

- 4. The LAW is all of that... but the unregenerate Jews were not

Central problem: self-confidence, “I don’t need grace, I am complete!”

E. Diagnostic Questions (vs. 21-22)

- 1. “Have you enrolled in your own seminar?”

vs. 21 “You, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself.”

- 2. Do you practice what you preach? Or are you a hypocrite?

vs. 21-22 *“You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?”*

This list suggestive only... there are other things in the Law! Coveting (Romans 7)

3. Central Thrust: Do you live up to the Law?

vs. 13 *“It is not those who hear the Law who are righteous in God’s sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.”*

It’s not having the Law, knowing the law, preaching and teaching the Law... it’s OBEYING THE LAW that shows a righteous heart

F. Devastating Conclusion: You Jews Dishonor God!!

vs. 23-24 *“You who brag about the Law, do you dishonor God by breaking the Law? As it is written, ‘God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.’”*

1. Far from glorifying God, the Jews dishonored God every day
2. The Law was God’s expressed will for His covenant people
3. They were meant to walk in its light and take the glory of God to the Gentiles
4. Instead they stripped God of His glory by disobeying God’s Law
5. As a result, instead of being a light for the Gentiles, they led them into greater blasphemy

IV. How Disobedience Dishonors God

vs. 23 *“Do you dishonor God by breaking the Law?”*

A. Central issue of life: living constantly for the glory of God

1 Cor. 10:31 *So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*

1. Glory of God = display of His worth and value
2. Living for the glory of God = living to rejoice in, be satisfied with and display the incredible worth and value of God

B. Honor = worth, value, price

Illus. Setting price at a yard sale or in a retail store... each item appraised

Dishonor = weighing God’s worth, His value... and casting Him away as worthless

Exactly the same as the Gentiles: "They exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images"... Jews "stripped God of His worth and value by disobeying Him."

C. Essence of worship = setting value of God properly

worship = "worthship"... declaring the worth of God

1 Timothy 1:17 "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen."

D. Jewish History of Dishonoring God: Culminating in Rejection of Christ

1. Old Testament: open disobedience and cold formalism

Malachi 1:6 "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?" says the Lord Almighty.

Isaiah 29:13 The Lord says, "These people come near me with their mouth, and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men."

2. Christ came: rejected by His own people

John 8:49 "I am not possessed by a demon," said Jesus. "But I honor my Father and you dishonor me."

I appraise the value and worth of my Father properly by constantly obeying Him... you dishonor me by calling me demon-possessed... you value me as worthless!!!

Zechariah 11:12 "...thirty silver coins, that magnificent price at which they priced me!"

3. Salvation occurs with the proper valuing of Christ

1 Peter 1:18-19 "...you were redeemed ... with the precious blood of Christ"

1 Peter 2:6-7 "For in Scripture it says, 'See I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.' Now to you who believe, this stone is precious..."[but to unbelieving Jews, the stone is cursed]

E. Jewish Disobedience Dishonored God

1. God gave the Law as a Blessing... a blessed way of life followed obedience

a. the disobedient one thinks a different path will bring a better life

- b. “Thou shalt not commit adultery...” BUT the adulterer thinks this will bring him joy
- c. he strips God of honor because
 - i) he trades fellowship with God for something far less... treats God as worthless
 - ii) he thinks he knows better than God what kind of life brings blessing, so He calls God’s wisdom worthless

“I know a better way than God’s laws... I’ll do it on my own!”

2. God also threatened curses in the Law for disobedience

- a. the disobedient one fears no answer from God... no curse will come
- b. he sins without fear since he thinks God will not respond
- c. thus he strips God of honor because
 - i) he thinks God is a liar who will not carry his threats through
 - ii) he thinks God doesn’t see the sin, doesn’t care, is not holy enough to punish sin
 - iii) he shows contempt for the riches of God’s kindness, tolerance, and patience

“God is hardly worth thinking about... God never punishes sin anyway—look at all the evil people in the world who get away with murder!”

Disobedience to God’s law strips God of His glory!

V. False Confidence #2: Circumcision and Jewish Identity (vs. 25-27)

A. Jewish Designation: Two Kinds of Men in the World

Illus. Japanese distinction: Nihonjin and Gaijin... Japanese and non-Japanese

- 1. Jews took great pride in their race
- 2. Designation: “circumcised and uncircumcised”

Ephesians 2:11 “... you who are Gentiles by birth and called ‘uncircumcised’ by those who call themselves ‘the circumcision’ (that done in the body by the hands of men)...”

- 3. To become Jewish (i.e. a child of Abraham), you had to be circumcised
- 4. All covenant promises came through Abraham

B. Circumcision Given to Abraham: a sign of the covenant promise (more in Romans 4)

BUT the promise came first!!!

C. Circumcised But Disobedient??

vs. 25 *“Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised.”*

1. Disobedience to the Law makes a Jew a Gentile
2. Jews constantly broke the covenant... they are no better than Gentiles

D. Gentiles Who Obey the Covenant:

vs. 26 *“If those who are not circumcised keep the law’s requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised?”*

1. New definition of the Law: circumcision a requirement, but not the center of the Law
2. Possible to obey the Law and NOT BE CIRCUMCISED!!!
3. Last week: the core of the Law is eternal... justice, mercy, faithfulness;

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength; Love your neighbor as yourself

4. Gentiles who obey put Jews who disobey to shame

vs. 27 *“The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision are a lawbreaker.”*

On Judgment Day, Gentile believers put disobedient Jews to shame by contrast

E. In Christ: A New Definition of Circumcision, A New Definition of a Jew

vs. 28-29 *“A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly, and circumcision is circumcision of the heart by the Spirit, not by the written code.”*

1. Physical circumcision means NOTHING

Gal. 6:15 *Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything. What counts is a new creation.*

2. Spiritual circumcision means EVERYTHING

The “new creation” is new birth by the Holy Spirit... the Spirit lives within you and transforms you from within... a **“circumcision of the heart by the Spirit...”**

He causes you to love God with every fiber of your being and to hate sin with all your soul

3. Obedience to the Spiritual and Eternal Law is result

Circumcision of the heart produces obedience to God Law... or it has not occurred!!

4. Thus we have a new definition of “circumcision” and “Jew”
 - a. born again by the Spirit, circumcised heart cleansed from the dominion of sin
 - b. these are all true “Jews”... grafted into the tree of God’s people (Romans 11); inheritors of all of Abraham’s promises (Ephesians 2)

Philippians 3:3 “For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of Christ, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh.”

VI. Living for Praise From God (vs. 29)

vs. 29 “Such a man’s praise does not come from men but from God.”

A. Religious Hypocrisy Has One Central Motive: Praise from People

1. Jews in Romans 2 looked great on the outside
2. Jesus referred to this in Sermon on the Mount
 - a. long prayers on the street corners
 - b. tithes given with the fanfare of trumpets
 - c. people in awe of their religious piety

Matthew 6:2 “I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.”

B. God Forces a Choice: Please Men or Please Me

John 5:44 “How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?”

1. Living for praise from visible men makes faith impossible
2. Living for praise from God makes praise from men worthless

C. Marvelous Symmetry!!

1. We Glorify God, He Gives Us His Glory
2. We Praise God, He Praises Us
3. This all occurs on Judgment Day

1 Corinthians 4:5 “At that time, each will receive his praise from God.”

Matthew 25:21 “Well done, good and faithful servant, you have been faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into the joy of your master!”

John 12:26 “My Father will honor the one who serves me.”

VII. Summary and Application

A. Summary

Paul seeks to show Jews they need Christ too

Two sources of false confidence: possession of the Law, circumcision

Possessing and Knowing the Law is nothing without OBEDIENCE to the Law

Circumcision is nothing without OBEDIENCE to the Law

Jews “dishonor God” by breaking the Law, just as Gentiles exchanged God’s glory by idolatry

Jew & Circumcision redefined:

A true Jew is one who is circumcised in his heart by the Holy Spirit, and who seeks praise for God AND praise from God by obeying the eternal Law both openly and privately by the power of the Spirit.

B. Application: Does That Statement describe You?

Religious hypocrisy just as dangerous now as it was then... even more so, since we have more Scripture & more blessings than the Jews did

Do you live for human praise or for praise from God?

Look at your secret life... find the answers there

Are you fighting sin with all your being by the Spirit?

