

XIII. Romans in Biblical Perspective
The Gospel of God
“Religion Will Not Save on Judgment Day—Part 1”
Romans 2:17–24
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Our text for this study will be from Romans 2:17–24 but for our opening reading I’d like to start by looking in Philippians 3 where Paul is giving a word of testimony in order to use his testimony to point us to a Gospel reality and a Gospel truth. This is the Word of God and it’s the truth. Philippians 3:1–11 says *[1] Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.*

[2] Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. [3] For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— [4] though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: [5] circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; [6] as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. [7] But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. [8] Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ [9] and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— [10] that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, [11] that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

Before we get into Romans 2, when will we get to the Gospel of God and get out of this judgment stuff? If Paul was answering this question he would say ‘that’s where we are.’ Basically that is what Paul said when we left off in Romans 2:16 in the last study when he said *[16] on that day (the judgment day) when, **according to my Gospel**, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.* In other words, the reality of the Judgment Day in that all must appear, we will see just how much of a sinner we were when we were saved. We were more sinful than we ever dared to imagine. That means our worship will increase because we will see that God’s grace was greater than we could ever hope.

Another purpose of the Judgment Day is not simply to identify those in the books who are under condemnation and those in the Book of Life, but there will be a righteous and holy sifting and sorting. In Europe and England they particularly talk about sorting things. My grandmother used to use that phrase – go and sort things into order. The Bible is clear about this sifting and sorting at the Judgment but I think we’re going through a sifting and sorting right now. We are starting to see what it’s like to live in a culture that is increasingly hostile to Biblical Christianity and those who are in it for gain and not for Christ will either get converted or sorted and sifted out. On that Day as the sifting and sorting takes place there will be some we thought were saved because of their religious performance yet we’ll find out they may have been in the vineyard but not in the Vine. You need to know that religion cannot save you, only Christ.

I had the blessing of godly leaders in my life – my parents, my grandparents, coaches, teachers and preachers. They all knew that leaders in the various spheres of life, when you are talking with people you're responsible for, on the one hand you have to talk to them but on the other hand you sometimes have to give them a talking to. That is what Paul is doing for us here in Romans. He will be talking about the majesty of the Gospel but right now he is giving us a talking to. He is letting us know we have two appointments – death and judgment. We don't know when these appointments will happen but they will be kept and Paul wants us to know what will happen at that Judgment and that all will be there. Unless you're in Christ, you will be indicted and under God's judgment according to the life you were given for all eternity which is hell. If you know that Day is coming and this day you know you're helpless, hopeless, without Christ and you flee the wrath to come by coming to Christ by confessing your sins and putting your trust in Him, then in that Day your life will be unfolded with the evidences of your conversion and your stewardship. I loved to watch Perry Mason and I'm attracted to the defense lawyers. They always want to know what the defense strategy is going to be. Paul is exposing the defense strategies of the Gentiles and the Jews and dismantling them for they are not going to work on that day.

Romans 1:16–17 says *[16] For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. [17] For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."* Paul is telling us there is this glorious good news which is the Gospel of God and whether you are a Jew or Gentile you can be saved and you need to be saved. One, you are dead in your sins and the power of God can raise you up from death unto life where you can be born again. Two, heaven is for the righteous and in Christ you get not the righteousness of men but you are clothed with the righteousness of God. Until the Gospel brings you down to your sins and helplessness, you'll never be brought up to salvation in Christ.

So first of all, Paul brings down the Gentiles in Romans 1:18–32, who think they're ok because they have irreligion religion. Do you know how much faith it takes to suppress the truth that there is a Creator? That is an act of faith. Religion also evangelizes. Romans 1:18–19 says *[18] For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. [19] For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.* We live in the theater of God's glory for it's all out there in the creation with the surround sound shouting at us. Your problem is not that you don't have enough information for your problem is a heart problem and you suppress the truth in unrighteousness. You have a religion of denial/suppression and the sacrament of rebellion against God is sexual anarchy, sexual promiscuity, sexual perversion and it's not enough you have to sin against God but you recruit others with you so that society approves that sin to call evil good and good evil. Part of your accountability is that in this day He gave you over to that sin, over to your will because you don't want God's will. The giving over to your will leads to the death spiral of life and culture. The Gentile pagan religion of irreligion stands condemned.

Paul also knows a group of people are listening to him and saying 'that's right, give it to them Paul!' These are the Gentile religionists – the moralists. They have a man-made religion that they love to place upon everyone else but themselves. They condemn those who practice those things but do them themselves. The key word here is hypocrisy. These people think they will be okay at the day of judgment because they condemned the people that are going to be condemned there, but Paul says 'yet you do the same' and their judgment will be even greater because with greater life becomes greater responsibility.

Now Paul turns to the Jew who has been given true religion through God's Divine revelation and thinks that will be their ticket on that Day. They think they can rely on that for their salvation. Spoiler alert, we're about to get another indictment that will not work. We are about to take one more step to Romans 3:23 which says *[23] all have sinned and come short of the glory of God*. Not only do the works of sin bring us to judgment but the works of true religion without Christ bring men and women to judgment. In other words, I'm not going to get into heaven because I preach sermons in a Bible believing church or because I have done hundreds of Christian weddings according to God's Word. I'm not going to get into heaven because I've been baptized or because I've counseled people or because I've shared the Gospel with people. The only way I get into heaven is by putting my trust in Christ alone.

What is true about the Jew in the first century who had true religion revealed in the opening 39 books of the Bible, we now 2000 years later have the fulfillment of the Old Testament in Christ revealed in the 27 books of the New Testament. We have the marks of true religion if you are engaged in a church committed to true religion that won't get you to heaven, only Jesus will. This has been a very sobering time for me as I have been preparing for this study and it's very important that we understand it. So, let's look at the text for this study in Romans 2 of Paul's dialogue of the Jew who had been given true religion by Divine revelation in the Word of God.

There are ten privileges of true religion in this text and they are divided into two. There are the privileges which you receive in true religion and there are the privileges that are called for in action in true religion. Romans 2:17–20 says *[17] But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God [18] and know His will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law; [19] and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, [20] an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth—*

The first time they called themselves Jews, this nation of Israel from the seed of Abraham was II Kings 6:6 and it wasn't used in a term of derision as it is sometimes today, with the sinfulness of anti-Semitism. It was used as an identifying factor, a profession. They believed there was one God, one true religion, one people of God unlike those surrounding them. So this term here is given in a positive sense. One privilege is relying on the law and it doesn't just mean the Ten Commandments. It means the revealed, infallible, unbreakable Word of God. Another way to say this is to rely on the authoritative teaching of God.

The second privilege is you boast in God and God has had a covenanted relationship with only one nation and that is the nation of Israel. We have God and God has made covenant with us, unlike all the surrounding nations, we boast in God.

Number three, we know the will of God. The secret things belong to the Word of God which is found in Deuteronomy 29:29 but the things revealed to us and to our children. So, we have the will of God to guide us in life through His commandments.

Number four we have and do affirm the excellencies of God. The glory of God has been entrusted to us, within the holy of holies in the temple, within the truth of His Word, with His pillar of cloud and fire and all the excellencies and attributes of God His glory has been entrusted and deposited within us.

Number five, we are instructed in the law of God. God has given us teachers and prophets to teach us the law of God that has been given to us. So, these are the privileges of true religion that has been received in the context of true religion that which was contained and

revealed in the opening books of the Bible known as the Old Testament. Now the privileges received call for a response. So, the next five are the privileges of true religion and their calling.

Number one is we have a privilege to be a guide to the blind. Number two we are a light to those who are in darkness. Number three we are an instructor to the foolish because it is the fool who has said there is no God (Psalm 14:1). Fools are those who deny God or that there is a God. Number four, we are a teacher of children. Number five, we have in the law the embodiment of the knowledge of truth. These are the callings of those who have received these privileges of true religion. Do you see the parallels that are working here? You have received and now you do. You have been instructed, now instruct. You have been taught, now teach. You have been guided, now guide.

There is nothing wrong with this list. This is what God has given in true religion and what God calls those to whom it is given to do. What makes this list wrong is when it is substituted by the arrogance of men that when they do this then they think they save themselves, instead of fleeing to the God who reveals true religion, for only He alone can save. Now Paul does something with five intentional, rhetorical questions.

Romans 2:21–24 says *[21] you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? [22] You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? [23] You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. [24] For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”* (This is a quote from Isaiah 52)

I hear this a lot; come to Christianity for it is not a religion, it’s a relationship. I know what people are trying to communicate but it’s not true. Christianity is a religion. Why do you think James say ‘here is true religion’ (James 1:27). The key is that Christianity is not a man-made religion. Christianity is a God-given religion. The statement really should say ‘Christianity is a religion but the religion is a way of life that shapes God’s people together as His covenant people, but it can’t save them for only a relationship with Christ can save you.’ Religion means a sacred way of life. There is nothing wrong with having your way of life with a corporate community of God’s people to be shaped by God’s covenants, vows, promises, means of grace, etc., all those things God has given us as to how to live in this age. This is how to be in the world but not of the world and as you do these things you are on mission, on message and in ministry and this is true religion when you live this way but true religion can’t save you. It can be an evidence of your salvation but only Christ can save you.

As Paul wrote this 2000 years ago, it is not a strange application for me to change the word Jew in this text to Christian. We are in a church that believes the Bible, gives to missions, does deeds of mercy, committed to God-centered worship, believes the sanctity of gender, sexuality within the context of marriage, sanctity of life, sanctity of family, etc. In the Day of Judgment being a member of a church like that will not get you by for you have to know Christ and He has to know you. Your profession on true religion will not save you on the Judgment Day but only your possession of Christ and Christ’s possession of you.

I don’t think many are reading this if they have opted out for a man-made religion only but I could have some people reading this who are on my heart. I know you want me to move on and talk more about the Gospel but this is a Gospel message. You may knowingly or unknowingly think that if you joined a Bible believing church, committed to true religion, would save you. It won’t and it can’t for only Christ can save you. Paul is showing how you can have the surroundings of the right profession but you don’t have the possession. You are not Christ’s

and Christ is not in you. You may be in that Hebrews 6 church – those who have seen, tasted, experienced, the good things to come. You may be in the vineyard but are you in the Vine?

My grandmother had a scuppernong vine and oh how I loved that vine. I remember one of my duties was to pull out all the fake vines that were growing up that looked like the real vines for they weren't in the vine but just in the vineyard. They were on the arbor. On that Day there will be some who are in the arbor but not in the Vine – Judas (Ischriot), Demas. John says there are those who go out from us because they were never really part of us. The only way to get there is through Jesus.

Now that much of the COVID restrictions have been lifted I am travelling more because I have been asked to speak more. The governor of the state I live in pretty much lifted all restrictions and I was travelling to Philadelphia this past week but wasn't sure about bringing a mask. It was a good thing I had it because when I entered the Philadelphia airport I hear this announcement that it was still a state mandate there to wear a mask or you couldn't fly so because I needed to fly I was going to wear a mask. I get to the TSA check point and I was asked about my ticket which I showed them electronically on my iPhone. I was then asked about identification which I showed him my driver's license. When he looked at my license he then said 'pull your mask down and let me see who you really are.'

I have all my credentials – baptism certificate, church membership, ordination papers from a PCA church, Sunday school pin, Alliance youth fellowship pin – but on that Day, none of this will matter. Take your mask off. Hypocrite is a word that Jesus uses more than anyone else. It was a word used for an actor because they really only needed one actor to play five or six different people due to the fact they would put a different mask on each time they spoke for a different character. Take the true religion mask off and let's see what's in your heart. Do you have Christ and does Christ have you?

Here is the takeaway. The Judgment will infallibly reveal those who are relying upon the external identifications of the privileges of true religion, but are devoid of a personal relationship with Christ. Who do you think Paul would have in mind as he wrote this? Paul has basically given you his testimony. There was a day he thought 'I am a Jew. I confess I'm a Jew and I was born of the seed of Abraham of the tribe of Benjamin. As to the law I was impeccable and was so impeccable they made me a Pharisee. As to zeal, when they told me to persecute the church I did it. I was the one they entrusted the death warrants to for Christians.' Now he says that those things he has now counted as loss, as rubbish in order to be found in Christ.

There is a time to talk about things we have given up but when Paul is talking about loss, he isn't talking about the trappings of life. He is telling us that at that time when he was a Pharisee with his trappings and privileges of true religion, he thought those would save him but today since he knows the truth of who Jesus is and has a personal relationship with Him, he counts those things he once was as rubbish. Not that they are rubbish in and of themselves but they are rubbish as a foundation for salvation for they can't save you.

An illustration of this from Jesus is found in Luke 18:9–14 that includes a Pharisee, which says [9] *He (Jesus) also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: [10] "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. [11] The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. [12] I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' [13] But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' [14] I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than*

the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

Jesus tells us here that the man who depended upon his true religion was not the one who was justified in Him but the one, the publican who knew he was helpless and hopeless and needed a Savior so he cast himself only upon Jesus. Will that lead to a life that is framed by the precepts of God's Word? Yes, true religion can be a marvelous evidence of salvation but it is never the ground of salvation. Only Christ by His power and righteousness can and will save His people. It is that glorious truth that Christ is the One who is ours and when we stand before the Judgment Seat as the mask is taken off, then what will be seen is Jesus – I am His and He is mine. That is our only Hope.

As the song says from "Christ, Our Hope in Life and Death,"
*O sing hallelujah! Our hope springs eternal;
O sing hallelujah! Now and ever we confess
Christ our hope in life and death. (alone)*

I want to make this plain and clear. Works do not save you. Works can evidence your salvation. Ephesians 2:8–10 says *[8] For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast. [10] For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.* Good works are glorious evidences and that is a life of true religion which is its purpose as it shapes us, but works can't save you, not even good works. None of us are going to heaven because we tithe or give out Gospel tracts. We are going to heaven when we have repented and confessed our sins and cast ourselves upon Christ alone.

There is a danger when people think that they go to a church and are a member of that church that is on mission, on message and in ministry and it's not one of those liberal churches. If that's what you are depending upon you will be indicted on that Day. Your only hope is Christ. I love the EE (Evangelism Explosion) question that says 'when you stand before God and He says 'why should I let you into heaven,' what will you say?' The answer is Christ alone. In the Judgment Day when the mask is removed, those who know Him are His.

The Apostle Paul who had these impeccable credentials from true religion that he was depending upon to save him, said that now is rubbish. He still had the evidences of true religion but they now were the evidences of his salvation in Christ and we're no longer the ground of his salvation. When he was converted his testimony says he left that – all my sin, arrogance and pride – he put his trust in Christ. Then fast forward to II Timothy where Paul is at the end of his life and the man who counted all things as loss for the sake of knowing Christ (Philippians 3) says this in II Timothy 1:12, *[12] which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know **whom** I have believed, and I am convinced that He is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me.* You can't get into heaven with a theological exam.

Paul didn't put his faith in his conversion or his theological acumen or in faith itself. He didn't say I know what, when or that I believe but he knew personal Whom he believed and Jesus was his. Close with Christ today if you never have. I love true religion dearly, I love His church, its covenants, its vows, the means of grace, His offices and all those things but none of them are designed to save us. It is Christ alone. As the song "In Christ Alone" says,
*In Christ alone I place my trust
and find my glory in the power of the cross. Let's pray.*

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Lord, speak to the hearts of those reading this today for some may have come seeking today. May they be grateful to hear that You have Your churches who are seeking to be true to Your Word, but may they not put their trust in those churches but they put their trust in Christ alone. God, I thank You so much that when we trust Christ we can function as members of the body of Christ, but that is the evidence of our saving relationship, not a substitute. Our righteousness is like filthy rags, even if it's been an effort at true religion righteousness. The only one work that can save us is the only the work of Christ – on the cross where He bore our sins, gives us His righteousness, where He cuts out our heart and gives us a new heart, where He takes away our sin record and gives us a new record. I pray that everyone reading this will hear the voice of Jesus who says by the Spirit, 'come to Me for I will give you rest.' Jesus I pray that no one reading this will arrive on that Day there without coming to Christ. As Paul faced appointment number one, his death, he anticipated appointment number two – I know whom I have believed. Lord, give that glorious assurance to anyone reading this that we wear not a mask of irreligion or a false man-made religion or even of true religion, but we are Christ's and our hope is Him alone. Take a few moments in silent prayer. Jesus hear the prayers of Your people giving You praise because You gave them eyes to see and ears to hear and while they love the true religion of Your church their hope is Christ. Those reading this who may knowingly or unknowingly relying on true religion to save instead of Christ, may they flee the wrath to come by fleeing to Christ today, in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

The Day of Divine Judgment is not simply an important doctrine to understand to appreciate the Gospel of God, but is an integral element in the proclamation of the Gospel of God.

Irreligionists – False Religionists – True Religionists

PRIVILEGES OF TRUE RELIGION – RECEIVED

1. Rely on the Law of God – His Word
2. Boast in God – “Covenanted Nation”
3. Know the will of God – “His Commandments”
4. Affirm the excellencies of God – “His Glory”
5. Instructed in the Law of God – “His Prophets”

PRIVILEGES OF TRUE RELIGION – CALLING

1. Guide to the blind
2. Light to those in darkness
3. Instructor of the Foolish
4. Teacher of Children
5. Stewards of Truth and Knowledge

Five Intentional Questions

LIFE TAKEAWAY

The Judgment will infallibly reveal those who are relying upon their external identification with the privileges of true religion but are devoid of a personal relationship with Christ as Lord and Savior.