

Connection to Romans 2

Paul reminded his readers that religion did not rescue a person from sin. Both the religious person and the pagan need a Savior.

Introduction/Opening

When Paul's letter was read in the Roman church, no doubt opinions were formed, and many heads nodded as he condemned idol worshipers, homosexual practices, violent people, and much more (Rom. 1). Paul may have been addressing Jews and Gentiles who were for all appearances religious and moral people. The Jews knew the Law of Moses and rested in their covenant relationship with God. Religious Gentiles could think of themselves as above the sins identified in Romans 1, living by a high moral standard.

Paul laid out his case for why all people need the gospel, and that includes the religious. So, what were the objections of the religious? What would the religious person say to Paul's characterization of humanity? Better yet, maybe we should ask ourselves, "Are we religious people?" We might be religious if...

Outline

1. We Think We Have It All Together (vv. 1-2).

The religious may think they can condemn others since they have it all together, but they are just as evil. They too are without an excuse. In fact, when they say others are evil and should be punished, they are displaying their own failure to live up to the moral law they know. In their condemnation of others, they excuse and overlook their own sin. They make the error of minimizing God's moral standard by emphasizing externals and underestimate the depths of their own sinfulness.

2. We Tend to Find Fault in Others (vv. 2-3).

Paul paints the religious people as having a need to find others whom they consider worse, morally, so they can feel good about themselves. This makes one critical of others. They think they can condemn people whom they consider to be on lower moral ground. They think they can judge others, and this may help them feel morally superior to others. It's like an addiction to constantly prove they are morally superior.

3. We Don't Tolerate Being Confronted (vv. 4-5).

The religious don't tolerate being confronted about their wrongdoing. By pointing their finger at others, they believe they can avoid being judged themselves. The Jews had often experienced God's kindness and believed they received these blessings because they were right with God with no need for Jesus. They refused to repent and accept God's pardon of sin through faith in Jesus Christ. They could not tolerate being confronted with their own sinfulness.

4. We Have Trouble Applying Truth (vv. 6-13).

Simply hearing the law does not make one right with God. The religious may read Scripture, memorize it, say they love it, and teach it, but one must obey Scripture to be found right with God. Scripture teaches that salvation is not based on works but it consistently teaches that God judges us based on our own deeds and not the deeds of others.

Paul distinguishes two groups in this text. The redeemed and the unredeemed. The deeds of the redeemed are not the basis of their salvation but the evidence of it. The redeemed are empowered to obey by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. They are not perfect and are prone to sin, but there is undeniable evidence of righteousness in their lives.

5. We're tortured with being good enough (vv. 14-16).

Paul tells us that the religious know they can't live up to the law. Their conscience bears witness to this fact.

Conclusion

The apostle Paul addressed anyone who judges and anyone who presumes to judge others. The self-righteous person, regardless of their nationality, finds themselves under the same judgment as the pagans referred to in the first chapter. This is true even if a person does not necessarily commit all the same specific sins outlined in the first chapter. The self-righteous person who assumes the position of judge is putting himself or herself in the place of God, which is idolatry.

This brings attention to the great need of the gospel for everyone. God reveals His righteousness by providing salvation to all who place their trust in Jesus. Jesus is the only rightful Judge, with His gospel serving as the one standard by which all others are judged.

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