

Start, 6/12/19

Lesson 15

As the preacher said Sunday, Context, Context, Context.

We are looking at Romans in its historical context. All the New Testament was written before the Jewish-Roman war, so a Jew in the historical context was an Israelite who was a descendant of those who came out of Egypt and was led into Palestine by Joshua. He was a descendant of those who returned from Babylonian captivity as recorded in Ezra and Nehemiah. Those Israelites are identified as Jews.

### **Romans 2:17-29. Important historical context**

**Now, Paul specifically addresses the Jews, Israelites at Rome.**

Jew

Here is a very short overview of “Jew.” Paul will deal with the true Jew in great detail later on.

1) Jew: anyone born in the line of Judah. Over time, the word “Jew” enlarged to include not only the tribe of Judah, but all of the Children of Israel. Any individual or national identity of those Jews was totally erased from history in the Jewish - Roman war of 67-70 A. D. Rome burned Israel’s Archives.

2) Jew: anyone who lived in the land of Judea, which included the city of Jerusalem. They were Judean. After the Jewish - Roman war, the land became known as Palestine, and its inhabitants became known as Palestinians. Jesus Christ was a Jew in the sense that he was born of the tribe of Judah, as Matthew and Luke prove, and he lived in the land of Judah, making him a Judean. Christ was not a Jew according to the general usage of the word today.

Today:

3) Jew: anyone whose mother was a Jew.

4) Jew: anyone who has gone through the formal process of conversion to the Jewish religion.

5) Jew: anyone who simply self-identifies himself a Jew or because others might

identify him as a Jew, as did Hitler. The self-identified Jew is not required to show any historic connection with the ancient Children of Israel, for there is none.

6) Jew: anyone who has professed faith in Jesus Christ, Christians. Since the start of the Gospel Age, God has declared that Christians are the only proper and legal heir to the name Jew. Those who are followers of Christ are identified by the Word of God as the "Israel of God."

Paul makes it clear that both the **Jews**, or Israelites, as well as those outside of the then existing Israelite nation, Gentiles or Greeks, need God's gospel. He first sums up a number of things in which the Jews boasted.

They boasted that they were in connection with God. They were confident they could be leaders, lights, instructors and teachers in divine things because they thought they knew God's will through the law. They imagined others were inferior: blind, in darkness, foolish and babes. They felt superior and elevated above other people. And God had revealed His will to them in the law. What they failed to admit was that they had to obey it. (Commentary on Romans, M.G. de Koning)

The Roman General, Pompey the Great, 106 BC-46 BC, intervened in a Jewish civil war between the Pharisees and the Sadducees in the first century BC. As a result, Pompey sent to Rome a great number of Jewish prisoners to be sold as slaves. The Jews proved to be so determined to continue in their Jewish rites and rituals, that the Romans chose to set them free in order to keep a reasonable peace in the city. Rome assigned to them a place close to the city. Josephus tells us that 4000 were banished from Rome at one time, and even a greater number were punished who refused to become Roman soldiers.

So, there was a very large Jewish population at Rome. The gospel had made its way back to Rome from Peter's sermon in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. The gospel worked its power among both the Jews and the Gentiles, and the church there became known for its faithfulness to what it knew of the gospel.

It is evident that the church at Rome was made up of Jews and Gentiles, but it seemed to be dominated by Jews. The Israelite Jews were proud of their heritage, and considered the Gentiles second-class Christians. Thus, the church basically divided into two camps.

We can assume this was a common problem throughout the first century church, a division between the Israelite, or Jewish members and the non-Israelite, Gentile members. Therefore, we see the many passages concerning church unity, as the apostles call for the joining together of the Jewish community and the Gentile community within the same congregation. The distinction was not really eradicated until the Jewish-Roman war.

James deals with the problem also.

Though there are various factions in the church today, it is not an Israelite, Jewish faction vs a non-Israelite, or Gentile faction.

Today, Jew—one who follows the Jewish religion; Gentile—one who does not follow the Jewish religion.

A reason for this book was to reconcile the two factions, Jew, Israelite, and Gentile into one united body in Christ. It appears that the two parties were trying to defend their particular opinions.

Paul is dealing with the Jewish pride which set themselves above the new non-Israelite Gentile converts. Paul is proving that both are equal before God, and both stand condemned as sinners.

When we think of "the church", we think of a local congregation. However, "church" is used as a general statement to include all believers. By that, I mean that the church at Rome was made up of many groups that were meeting in the name of Christ. So, it is possible that the two "factions" were meeting separately—one group for the Jews and one group for the Gentiles.

The problem Paul is dealing with was probably like the one addressed by Paul in

**Galatians 2:13** *And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. 14 But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? 15 We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, 16 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have*

*believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.*

In other words, though Peter saw the vision that joined the converted Israelites and the converted non-Israelites, he still had a problem with dissimulation, or hypocrisy.

Typical of Paul, he started this letter by complementing the church at Rome. Now he speaks quite strongly against divisions between the Jews and the Gentiles. It almost makes one think he is writing to a different group than who he addressed in chapter one. In fact, his words get so strong that he seems to be addressing the Jews who are completely outside the faith.

From Paul's words, we see that the Israelites were exalting themselves over the non-Israelites. The Israelites had been a special people who were chosen to be a priestly nation representing the true God to the surrounding world. They had been given the law by which God will judge the world through Christ Jesus. So, Paul starts his letter with some general statements:

**First**, proves that all men are natural sinners.

**Second**, all men, both Jews and Gentiles, in their hearts: The Jews had both their conscience and the revealed commandments, making them more accountable before God.

**Third**, God is no respecter of persons, Jew or Gentile.

Paul's progression here is interesting.

1. Pleasant toward all the church.
2. Identifies the downward trend of all mankind.
3. Condemns all professed Christians for their hypocrisy.
4. Condemns all professed Christians for their haughty spirit.
5. Condemns all Christians for any spirit of pride over the unsaved.
6. V. 29, he "cuts off" the proud Israelite Jews from being the true Jews, and he replaces them with those with the circumcised heart.

V. 29 removes the "Jew/Gentile" distinction, and replaces it with a "converted/unconverted" distinction.

**V. 17.** Though this section sounds like Paul is addressing unconverted Jews, we will look at it according to its context.

Here he starts directly addressing the Jews, showing that regardless of their high-sounding regard for the law, they were no better than the Gentiles. Under the influence of the Spirit, Paul shows that though he had never met them, he was not ignorant of the attitudes of their heart. He was speaking with knowledge.

**V. 17, *Thou art called a Jew*** by birth as an Israelite. It was considered an honorable title, for salvation was of the Jews, and they were proud of that fact.

He tells the Jews that they were to be a peculiar people. The Israelites had been set apart from the nations of the world to receive the written revelation of God, and to have God's presence among them. Though Israel had been set apart for the glory of God to be a priestly nation among the heathen, they had apostatized to the point that they were among the most wicked of men.

**Exodus 19:6** *And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.*

Because of national Israel's apostasy, it was replaced by the new nation of God, the Gospel Church. (Galatians)

**1 Peter 2:9** *But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:*

There were many evil practices under the name Jew:

Many of the synagogue of Satan were Jews, Revelation 2:9: *I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.*

In Matthew 3:7-9, John the Baptist called them a generation of vipers:

Matthew 3:7 *But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee*

*from the wrath to come? 8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: 9 And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.*

Today's Jewish religion includes the most evil **black magic** imaginable.

And today, there are **many evil practices under the best of names, Christian**. And the world delights in shining the light of public knowledge on such apostate Christianity.

**V. 17, *restest*...** They rested in the fact that the law was among them, and they were the people of the law. They were puffed up with their privilege, and considered it enough to deliver them from the wrath to come.

But Paul points out that though the law of God was in their books, and in their synagogues, it was not in their heart to obey. Rather, all it was to them was a source of pride over the Gentiles.

They rested their souls in their supposed special privilege of having the law of Moses, yet they were far from eternal security.

**It is a dangerous thing to rest in whatever external privileges we might think we have.**

***boast*... Spiritual pride is destructive.** I cannot count those who when they found I was a pastor would tell me how much they loved the Lord, yet their works did not correspond with their profession.

We had a man from Cumberland Maryland visit our church in WV. He arrived early, and while waiting for us to start, was telling how much he loved the Lord and the word of God. The message that day concerned divorce. He had been divorced and remarried, and never came back.

**Christians also can boast like this about knowing the Bible.** They tell others how to behave, but they have never seen themselves in the light of the Bible. They only know it for others. They may condemn stealing if someone else does it, but if they do it, they call it taking something to which they have a right. Similarly, they say it's wrong to commit adultery, but they forget the Lord Jesus said that "whoever

looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." { #Mt 5:27-28} They know an idol is an abomination, but they do not mind using their time, strength, property, intelligence, etc. for themselves instead of for God. So, if someone is boasting of knowing the will of God, but is not obeying it in his life, he then dishonors God. Isn't it true that God's name is blasphemed because people go to some religious meeting on Sunday, but during the rest of the week they try to enrich themselves as much as possible at the expense of others? (M.G. de Koning)

**V. 18, *knowest his will...*** The Israelites, Jews knew the will of God, not only did they know it but they approved those things found in his law as being *more excellent*.

Though Paul is speaking to the Israelites, Jews who knew and even taught the law, it applies very well to the hypocrite of all ages.

The hypocrite:

**1. knows and understands** the truth of God, the will of God, and he approves what he knows about God as being most excellent.

**2. is able to discern things** that differ. That is, he can distinguish between good and evil, though it may be difficult to discern between the two.

**3. can reason very well**, yet is a bad Christian.

**4. may be well skilled** and understand Scriptural controversies, yet be a stranger to the power of godliness.

**5. not only understands the truth of God's** word and God's will, and he is confident that he has the qualities needed to teach others whom he considered less learned than himself.

**Yet he is doing what he is trying to instruct others not to do.**

**Thus, the hypocrite can have great knowledge and understanding of the law, and even approve it as being *more excellent*, but he will not do it.**

How many good men can teach the deep and wonderful things of the Word of God, yet their lives outside of their teaching role are anything but what they teach.

V 18, ***Being instructed...*** These Jews took great pain in teaching their children when they were young. All their lessons were out of the law. They had all the knowledge, but that knowledge had made no impression on the heart.

V. 19. They were proud of and confident in their superior knowledge of the religion of God because they had been given the law. In their pride, they were confident that they could be a light to the world, and qualified to instruct the heathen world, and that they were able to lead the Gentiles whom they look down on as inferior. In Matthew 15:14 Christ warned about the blind leading the blind.

V. 20. Paul tells them that they only have a form of knowledge and of the truth in the law. He tells the hypocrite that he should be teaching himself what he is trying to teach others.

**2 Timothy 3:5** *Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.*

A sad example today is the home education movement, Christian schools and Christian colleges. They turn out man and women who know the truth of God's word, and how that truth is to be applied into life. The college graduates especially feel they are now qualified to teach others, though they are not doing what they know they should do.

Sadly, many Christian Colleges are experts in turning out hypocrites as described by Paul here in Romans.

**Isaiah 5:21** *Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!*

**V. 19, darkness...**

**Isaiah 42:6** *I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; 7 To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.*



Though Isaiah is speaking of Christ, Paul sounds like the Jews to whom he is speaking considered themselves the answer to Isaiah's prophecy. They were confident they had the corner on the truth, even the truth of the Gospel, and that all other nations must come to them for schooling in the gospel, for they were the ones who have the law-word of God.

**Job 12:2** *No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you.*

V. 21, they felt that they were the ones who were qualified to judge others.

They sinned against their knowledge of God's word and their profession of Christ. They were doing themselves what they were teaching others to avoid.

**Matthew 23:3** *All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.*

They destroyed with their lives what they built up with words. How can a Christian expect others to believe what he does not believe enough to live out in his actions?

Examples will govern more than rules. The Christian's greatest obstacle to his success in the Kingdom work is his life does not match his profession.

**V. 22, *Thou that sayest.***

Hypocrites can talk of religion, as if their tongues did run upon pattens, (footware, ed.) they are fair professors, but foul sinners; as was that carnal cardinal Cremensis, the pope's envoy, sent hither, A. D. 1114, to interdict [or censure a Roman] priests' marriages, and being taken in the act with a common strumpet [promiscuous or disreputable woman], he excused it by saying he was no priest himself, but a correcter of them. (Trapp)

**Vv. 21, 22.** Paul lists 3 sins:

**1. Stealing.**

**Psalms 50:16** *But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth? 17 Seeing thou*

*hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee. 18 **When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers.** 19 Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit. 20 Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother's son. 21 These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. 22 Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver. 23 Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God.*

When a Christian sees a theft and say nothing, what does that make him?

**In Matthew 23:14**, the Lord charged the Pharisees with devouring widows' houses:

*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.*

**2. Adultery.** Again Psalms 50:18.

In spite of their strict moral laws in the commandments and in their moral codes, their lax divorce practices permitted adultery. According to the Talmud, some of their most celebrated rabbis were guilty of this sin.

**Matthew 19:8** *He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. 9 And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.*

**3. Sacrilege,** or rob temples.

Since their Babylonian captivity, the Israelites, Jews avoided idols. However, though they professed hatred for the idols in obedience to their laws, they made a good income by supporting the pagan temple traffic.

It is like a Christian who says he hates drunkenness, yet owns a bar that promotes drunkenness, or works in the liquor industry.

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