

SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS REFUTED

TEXT: ROMANS 2:17-24

INTRODUCTION:

1. Our text condemns Jewish self-righteousness (2:17), but this warning can apply to Gentile self-righteousness as well (cf. 2:9-11).
2. The Bible condemns Jews for their ungodliness (2:22), and the Bible condemns Gentiles for their ungodliness (1:18).
3. The Bible teaches that the Jews had special privileges, but these privileges cannot shield them from the righteousness judgment of God. "As many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law" (2:12b).
4. John the Baptist said to the Pharisees and Sadducees, "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" (Matthew 3:7).
5. Our Lord said to the chief priests and the elders, "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matthew 21:43).
6. Our Lord repeatedly called the scribes and Pharisees hypocrites, and said, "Ye are the children of them which killed the prophets" (Matthew 23:31).
7. In John 8:44, our Lord said to the Jewish religious leaders, "Ye are of your father the devil..."
8. The Jews were very proud (Rom. 2:17). To this day, many still are.
9. But the Jews could not keep the law (2:21-23). This is one of the themes of the epistle (cf. 3:19, 20, 28; 4:13; 5:20; 6:14; etc.).
10. The word "law" is found 78 times in the book of Romans. The word "works" is found nine times (cf. 3:27; 4:2, 6; etc.).

I. THE PRIVILEGES OF BEING A JEW (2:17, 18)

II. THEIR CLAIM TO SUPERIORITY REFUTED

III. THEIR CLAIMS OF PRIVILEGES REFUTED

I. THE PRIVILEGES OF BEING A JEW (2:17, 18; 3:1, 2)

1. The Jews are proud of their heritage, but Paul points out that their boasting has failed to attain to righteousness (2:17-23).
2. Paul mentions several privileges:
 - retest in the law (2:17)
 - makest thy boast of God (2:17)

- knowest his will (2:18)
 - approvest the things that are more excellent (2:18)
 - being instructed out of the law (2:18; cf. 3:1, 2)
3. Because of these privileges, the Jews are proud. They are often self-righteous and looked down on others. Our Lord said the Pharisees "trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others" (Luke 18:9).
 4. Romans 2:23 teaches that when Jews pride themselves in their law, and then break the law, they dishonor God.
 5. In fact, because of their bad behaviour, "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles" (2:24).

II. THEIR CLAIM TO SUPERIORITY REFUTED

1. "And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind..." (2:19, 20). They were too proud to consider that they themselves were spiritually blind, and in spiritual darkness, and foolish.
2. Referring to their advantages, W.H. Griffith Thomas said, "But all this was utterly spoiled by the overweening pride and self-sufficiency which made all instruction of others intolerable through the teacher's self-righteousness" (*St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*).
3. John Phillips wrote, "The Jew set himself up as a teacher of others and did so with contemptuous pride and with deep scorn for the ignorance of others not so fortunate as himself. The word for 'foolish' in this passage is literally 'stupid.' The Jew looked with infinite disdain upon his Gentile neighbors for their abysmal ignorance" (*Exploring Romans*).
4. *Thayer's Greek Lexicon* says the Greek word translated "foolish" is often used in literature to describe beasts -- senseless, foolish, stupid, without reflection or intelligence.
5. In fact, the Jews referred to the Gentiles as dogs.
6. This is how the Jews in Paul's day thought of Gentiles. The Jews had valid reasons for thinking this way, but they were blinded by their own pride.

7. Pride is always bad. We must be careful to give God the glory in all things (Jeremiah 9:23, 24).
8. The man who claims to teach others is asked why he does not teach himself, etc. (2:21, 22).
9. "Thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?" (2:22). This is the only time we see the word "sacrilege" in the Bible.
10. *Thayer's Greek Lexicon* says, "Thou who abhorrest idols and their contamination, dost yet not hesitate to plunder their shrines."
11. This is why the Scofield margin says, "rob temples."
12. This could explain why the town clerk in Ephesus said to the angry mob, "Ye men of Ephesus...ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess" (Acts 19:37).
13. Griffith Thomas said, "Avarice was a Jewish sin, and it seems clear that sacrilege and temple robbing were popularly associated with the Jews (Acts 19:37). Thus, with unerring force and definiteness the Apostle drives home the truth against this self-righteousness" (*Romans*).

III. THEIR CLAIMS OF PRIVILEGES REFUTED (2:23, 24)

1. The Jews "boasted" (2:17), but they were hypocrites. People dislike all hypocrites, but the religious hypocrite is especially repugnant.
2. The religious hypocrite brings discredit on his religious profession. "As it is written" (Rom. 2:24) in Isaiah 52:5 -- "My name continually every day is blasphemed."
3. When David sinned with Bath-sheba, Nathan the prophet told him, "Thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme" (II Samuel 12:14).
4. Genesis 34 says the sons of Jacob deceived Hamor and his son Shechem (34:13). They said to them: We cannot allow our sister Dinah to marry a man that is uncircumcised; "for that were a reproach unto us" (36:14).
5. Their deceitful words pleased Hamor and his son Shechem, and the men of their city agreed to be circumcised. But when the men were sore from the circumcision, Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, took each

- man his sword, and came upon the city boldly, and slew all the males (34:25).
6. "And they slew Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went out" (34:26).
 7. Then they spoiled the city, and took their sheep, and their oxen, and their asses, and that which was in the city, and that which was in the field, and all their wealth, and all their little ones, and their wives took they captive, and spoiled even all that was in the house (34:27-29).
 8. After this brutal, bloody rampage, Jacob rebuked Simeon and Levi and said, "Ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites" (34:30).
 9. Jacob should have said, "Ye have made the name of our God to stink among the inhabitants of the land. Now the inhabitants of the land are going to think our God is like you -- deceitful and treacherous."
 10. *The Expositor's Greek Testament* says God "is now blasphemed among the nations because of the inconsistency between the pretensions of the Jews and their behaviour. As if the heathen were saying: 'Like God, like people; what a Divinity the patron of this odious race must be.'"

CONCLUSION:

1. Inconsistency dishonors God, and leads people to reject, and to even blaspheme Christianity.
2. Even to this day, David's sin is mocked by unbelievers.
3. Nathaniel Hawthorne was a 19th century novelist. His most famous book was *The Scarlet Letter*. W.H. Griffith Thomas quotes Hawthorne in his commentary on the book of Romans.
4. "Let us reflect, that the highest path is pointed out by the pure Ideal of those who look up to us, and who, if we tread less loftily, may never look so high again."