

ROMANS – LIVING BY FAITH
GOD’S RIGHTEOUSNESS & MAN’S REBELLION – Chapters 1-3

LESSON 8 – THE DISADVANTAGE OF THE ADVANTAGE – Romans 2:17-24

Did you know that it’s possible to have the right information but the wrong application in the spiritual life? How could the Jews go from the humility of Moses to the pride of the Pharisees? In this section of Romans 2, Paul shows us that background and heritage are not enough to save us.

A Danish philosopher looked around Copenhagen in the nineteenth century and saw lots of “Christians.” They owned unread Bibles and belonged to unattended churches. Even more tragically, they never encountered the God spoke words of eternal forgiveness. They had a powerless religion.

This philosopher recommended that these “Christians” ask God to, “Take it back...this Bible...it only makes us unhappy.” These professing Christians had the Bible and the knowledge of God, but it did them no good.

This is the exact problem Paul addresses here in Romans 2. Paul is clearly talking to the Jews and spends a great deal of time explaining to them that they are guilty before God just as those who are not Jews.

The Privileges of the Jews

The Jewish people were God’s chosen people and that made them a privileged people. Let’s look at some of the reasons for this...

A Hebrew Birth

The name Jew is a direct connection to Judah. It literally means “praised.” The Jews had prominence, position and privilege but Paul begins to reveal that there is very little proof to show their faith was genuine and real.

A Holy Book

When Paul talks about the law here, he is referring to all of God’s Word that had been received up to that time. The law was not just Exodus and Leviticus, it was all of the God inspired writings from Job to Moses to the prophets and all the way to Paul and the other apostles.

They not only had the law...they trusted it as truth. They had absolute confidence that it was from God...and they were not wrong. They did have the truth. It’s what they did or didn’t do with this truth that was the problem.

A History of Discernment

In verse 18, Paul says, “If you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law...” This is referring to the ability to recognize God’s message as genuine. This verse talks about the Jews’ ability to distinguish between right and wrong, good and bad or to reject those things that are against the will of God. The Jews knew the will of God but there is a huge difference in knowing God’s will and following God’s will.

These privileges were intended to bring the whole world into a relationship with God. Unfortunately, these privileges resulted in pride and self-confidence rather than trust and confidence in God.

The Profession of the Jews

In verses 19 and 20, Paul gives five reasons why the Jews were congratulating themselves...

They Were Guides to the Blind

It is true that they were supposed to be spiritual guides but Jesus told them in Matthew that they were blind themselves.

Matthew 13:13 "This is why I speak to them in parables:

Though seeing, they do not see..."

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Matthew 15:14 "Leave them; they are blind guides. If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit."

Matthew 23:24 "You blind guides!"

They Were Lights in the Darkness

Through Isaiah, God said that the Jews would be a light to the Gentiles.

Isaiah 42:6 "I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles."

Unfortunately, the Pharisees were not satisfied with the Gentiles coming to God, they insisted that they become legalistic, ritualistic, works-oriented followers.

They Were Possessors of Knowledge and Truth

With the law, the Jews had an outline or a sketch of God's knowledge and truth. Remember Jesus tried to fill-in the missing information for them by telling them that they understood the letter of the law but not the intent of the law.

Religious deception has never been more plainly seen than in these Jews to whom Paul was writing. All the knowledge and truth they possessed was merely symbolic with little or no substance.

The Practices of the Jews

Paul deals with this self-righteous behavior of the Jews by using questions to point out the inconsistency between what they claimed to be and what they really were.

You Want to Teach Others; Are You Teaching Yourself?

It is a matter of integrity to practice what you preach.

You Preach Against Stealing; Do You Steal?

The 8th commandment seems pretty clear and straightforward, but there is more than one way to steal from God and others. It could be that we are not worshipping God like we should, or giving to God like we should, or giving our employer a hard day's work...

Stealing is a subtle sin and easy to fall into.

You Say Not to Commit Adultery; Are You Unfaithful?

Scripture explains that keeping the 7th commandment has physical, mental and spiritual requirements.

Exodus 20:14 “You shall not commit adultery.”

Matthew 5:27-28 “You have heard that it was said, You shall not commit adultery. But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

James 4:4 “You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God”

You Brag About Possessing the Law; Do You Obey It?

John McArthur, in his New Testament Commentary, explained the problem Paul was addressing this way...

“Since it was impossible for anyone to keep all of God’s law perfectly, some of the rabbis began teaching that merely learning the facts of the Law was sufficient to please God. Weakening the purpose of the Law still further, some taught that mere possession of it, in the form of written scrolls, was sufficient. Still others taught that Jews were safe from God’s judgment simply because they were the specially chosen recipients and custodians of God’s Law.”

The Powerlessness of the Jews

The end result of their form of religion was that God was being blasphemed because of them. Paul says in verse 24, “God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.” This doesn’t mean that the Jews spoke out against God, but that the Gentiles...because of the wickedness of the Jews...blasphemed God, His Word and His salvation.