The Guilt of the Jews

Romans 2:17-29

Introduction: In verses 1-16

Paul had described the hypocrite in general terms – 1-3. Then he warned of wrath and judgment in verses 4-16. In this section, he gives a prime example of the hypocrite- the Jew.

Before we get into the passage proper, let me clarify one point: Paul is not talking here about whether a person possesses life, but how that person is living the life he professes to have.

I. Religious Orthodoxy Examined – 2:17–24

Religious orthodoxy is not limited to the Jew. It may be applied to any person with any belief system. We will try to keep that in mind as we proceed.

A. A Person’s Access to the Truth – 2:17–20

1. Being Confirmed in the Truth – 2:17–18

a. Called a Jew – 2:17a

“Indeed, if you are called a Jew,”

The “if” clause is first class, meaning that it is assumed to be true. “Assuming that” etc.” There are eleven statements that depend on that one condition (through verse 20) All of the verbs in this section are present tense, indicating that these actions are continuous actions.

There are many advantages to being a Jew:

Hebrew Birth – they were taught in the Synagogue. Most other people were steeped in superstition and idolatry.

The Jew also had Dietary Laws to maintain good health.

Laws of Conduct kept families together and functioning.

b. Rest in the Law – 2:17b

“and rest on the law,”

The Law told him where he had been, why he was here, where he was going and what he was supposed to be doing in the meantime.

c. Boast in God

“and make your boast in God,”

This was not an empty boast; they did indeed have the God of the universe as their God. He actually created the heavens and the earth. And He communicated with them.

d. Know God’s Will – 2:18a

“and know *His* will,”

Unlike the pagans, he worshipped a holy God Who loved him and would provide for him. He provided a detailed revelation of what He expected of His people and rewarded them for obeying. He also warned them of what would happen if they did not obey.

e. Approve Things that are Excellent – 2:18b

“and approve the things that are excellent,”

He had a revelation of truth and could be sure what to do what to expect when they followed that revelation.

f. Instructed Out of the Law – 2:18c

“being instructed out of the law,

The final statement tells how the other statements are true – they had the Law of God.

2. Being Confident of the Truth – 2:19–20

You Believe that you are:

a. A Guide to the Blind – 2:19a

“and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind,”

If you have the only inspired revelation in the world, you have a corner on the market. If the Pagans want to know the truth, they must come to you; or you go to them. Furthermore, you have that God-given responsibility and privilege of doing so.

b. A Light to those in Darkness – 2:19b

“light to those who are in darkness,”

You have the only true light.

c. An Instructor of the Foolish – 2:20a

“an instructor of the foolish,”

The pagans had their wise men, but they were totally ignorant of the truth in the Law of God.

The word for “foolish” is “stupid.” Paul is saying it as they actually believed it. They looked with distain on the Gentile. The law was something they learned and even memorized as children. That is much like a person raised in the U.S.A. in the 20th century. That kind of privilege comes with great responsibility. The condemnation of Rom. 2 applies, then and now.

d. A Teacher of Babies – 2:20b

“a teacher of babes,”

The term “babies” I also derisive. In the field of real knowledge, the pagans were like babies. They had to start with their ABCs of the Pentateuch.

e. You have a Precise Record of the Law of God – 2:20c

“having the form (outline) of the knowledge and the truth in the law.”

Paul would say later that in the last days they would be: having a form of godliness but ﻿﻿denying its power. And ﻿﻿from such people turn away!

Welcome to the last days!

B. A Person’s Accountability to the Truth – 2:21–24

1. Spiritual Insincerity Exposed – 2:21a

“You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself?”

The teacher must not only learn the truth in his own mind, he must apply it to his own life. In Isaiah 5, Isaiah pronounced woes on the people for many things

Woe to those who join house to house, Woe to those who rise up early and pursue drink. Woe unto them that call evil good, and *good evil* … Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes. (and he was right to do so)

But in chapter 6:1-3 He, himself, saw the Lord,

“In the year that ﻿﻿King Uzziah died, I ﻿﻿saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His *robe* filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, ﻿﻿with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ﻿And one cried to another and said: ﻿﻿“Holy, holy, holy *is* the Lord of hosts; ﻿﻿The whole earth *is* full of His glory!”

Then Isaiah said, “Woe is me for I am undone! Because I *am* a man of unclean lips,

And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The Lord of hosts.”

2. Spiritual Insensitivity Exposed – 2:21b–22

“You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal?” (21b)

The Jews were prosperous. People came to them for help. The Jews often took advantage of them.

“You who say, “Do not commit adultery,” do you commit adultery?” (22a)

This is not spiritual adultery as in James, but physical. It happened often, then and now. I don’t need to labor the point.

“You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?” (22b)

The Jews often captured idols which the enemy had taken into battle. Then they sold they to rival tribes nearby.

3. Spiritual Insolvency Exposed – 2:23–24

a. You Dishonor God – 2:23

“You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law?”

Your act is a sin in itself, but it is against God because it is His law that has been broken. An honest Jew would have to admit that Paul was right; especially because he was quoting their own scripture (See Isaiah 52:5)

More than that…

b. You cause God’s name to be blasphemed – 2:24

“For *“the name of God is* blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,” as it is written.”

After David’s sin with Bathsheba, The prophet Nathan said to David, “You have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme” (2 Sam. 12:14)

The Gentile might reason, ““Why should we honor God,” Gentiles may have reasoned, “when His Chosen People do not follow Him?” [BKC]

II. Religious Ordinances Examined – 2:25–29

A. The Limited Value of Rituals – 2:25–27

1. The Law that God Has Given – 2:25

“For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.”

Physical circumcision is only a picture of spiritual circumcision. It is the spiritual circumcision that is profitable. Without it the physical is worthless.

It is like water baptism in the new covenant. If you have been baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ, the water Baptism is a beautiful picture and testimony. If not it is useless and a sham.

2. The Light that a Person Has – 2:26–27a

a. A Man Devoid of Rituals may be more Righteous than the Man Devoted to them – 2:26

“Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision?”

“To obey is better than sacrifice” (2 Sam. 15:22) -- To obey is also better than circumcision.

b. A man devoted to rituals may be more responsible than the man devoid of them – 2:27

“And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, *even* with *your* written *code* and circumcision, *are* a transgressor of the law?”

B. The Limitless Value of Reality – 2:28–29

1. In Outward Appearance – 2:28

“For he is not a Jew who *is one* outwardly, nor *is* circumcision that which *is* outward in the flesh;”

2. In Inward Approval – 2:29

“but *he is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise *is* not from men but from God.”

Conclusion:

“If you bear the name of a Christian and rest on having the Gospel and glory in God and know His will and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the Gospel and are confident that you, yourself, are a guide to the blind, having in the Gospel the form of knowledge and truth.”

(Then would come the questions of 21 and 22)

You who glory is the Gospel, through your disobedience to the Gospel do you dishonor God? The name of God is blasphemed among the non-church members because of you.