

Intro:

The ancient preacher Augustine says this in a book he wrote for training preachers:

My preaching almost always displeases me. For I am eager after something better, of which I often have an inward enjoyment before I set about expressing my thoughts in audible words. Then, when I have failed to utter my meaning as clearly as I conceived it, I am disappointed that my tongue is incapable of doing justice to that which is in my heart. What I myself understand I wish my hearers to understand as fully; and I feel I am not so speaking as to affect this. The chief reason is that the conception lights up the mind in a kind of rapid flash; whereas the utterance is slow, lagging and far unlike what it would convey.¹

In many ways, this is exactly how I feel in preaching through Romans to you. I see things that I hope I can completely communicate to you, but I am afraid my own weakness and inadequacy fails to transmit the meaning completely and clearly.

Another factor that hinders clear communication lies on the other side of the pulpit – those who hear may lack attention, may make wrong assumptions about what is being communicated and totally miss the message.

Our family had a wonderful few days of rest and fellowship over in Washington this week. On the way to our destination, someone completely misinterpreted what I was communicating and we had an incident of road rage.

Let me be clear, it wasn't my daughters ... or my wife!

We were heading south in I-5, about to pass a semi-trailer in that curvy section just below Bellingham. The truck driver suddenly swerved over to the right, almost to the guard rail, then lurched back into his lane.

I hit the brakes, and then watched the man do it again. We thought he was going to have a wreck right in front of us, and all of us going at 70 miles an hour!

The guy behind me started flashing his lights at me, then, when we got past the truck, he swerved around, passed on our right, and glared at us as he went by. If looks could kill...

So, what was that? We were having a communication problem!

¹ Augustine, *De Catechizandis Rudibus* (Chapter 2) quoted by David Larsen, *In the Company of the Preachers*, Vol 1. p. 89.

My message would have been clear, if the other driver had been paying attention to what was going on!

Now, how about my communication with you on these important matters in the book of Romans?

- It is very likely I am inadequate for the task.
- It is also very likely that you may completely be missing what is being said — and it could be that you are deliberately missing it.

May God help us with these things! Our subject is far too important to miss. Pay close attention. *Your eternal soul may depend on understanding what I am trying to say.*

In Chapter 2, we have been repeating essentially the same theme over and over. The theme is this:

No one can justify himself before God by any human effort.

You see, the first point Paul is making in Romans is that every man needs the gospel. Why is this so?

- Because men are under God's wrath — Romans 1

But some men object:

- They agree that Pagans are Rightly Condemned

You think of the worst sinner you know or have ever heard of. Think of someone who spends their time and substance on riotous living – they are doing drugs, drinking, fornicating, fighting in the streets, living like animals, abusing children, murdering their enemies, etc., etc.

Everyone agrees, such people are rightly condemned; they deserve the wrath of God.

- But, they say, *I'm not like that!*

[How many of you would say, "I'm not like that?"]

- Instead, you might say, **I'm moral – I'm a good guy.**

Paul says, Do you think you will escape by your morality? What does your conscience say to you? How moral are you? How moral do you need to be?

- Well, then, you might say, **I'm a Jew. I have Divinely Approved and Revealed Religion and its Rituals.**

Paul says, What good is your religion? Does it keep you from sinning? What does the Law say? What does the morality of the heathen say? Your religion doesn't get you anywhere.

And that is where we are in our study.

Paul is slowly stripping away every possibility a man might have of trying to justify himself before God.

Today we are going to come to the concluding verses of Rm 2. They sum up the whole argument very concisely. They bring the whole matter to a conclusion.

Read Rm 2.25-29, text 28-29

Proposition: True religion involves an inner heart-change by the Spirit rather than an outer conformity to ritual.

I. The possibility of spiritual confusion based on external religion (28)

- A. The people Paul is addressing in this section of the chapter clearly see themselves as *bona fide* Jews, real Jews (17)
1. They bear the name 'Jew'
 2. They hold the blessings attendant on Judaism and its revealed religion (17-18)
 3. They are able to discern God's will and to teach others also (19-20)
 4. They participate in divinely sanctioned rituals (25)
- B. The underlying proposition of this entire passage is stated negatively in our text: Outward conformity to Jewish religion does not make you a real Jew (28)
1. Almost everyone agrees with this proposition – even an ethnic Jew is likely to agree
 2. It is possible to 'fake' religion – how?
 - a. Learn the code words
 - b. Learn the 'accepted' behaviour
 - c. Live in conformity to the external standard in order to 'make an appearance of religion'

Our verse says: ‘which is one outwardly’ — a literal translation could be ‘in the show’. Someone is not a real Jew who is one only ‘in the show’.

C. Now, I want to extend the impression of our verse and Paul’s whole argument: some who *are not* real Jews think they *are* real Jews

1. Who are these people?
2. The very people Paul is addressing in this passage: You, O Jew — v. 17.

What do you think of this quotation:

“We reject violence and terrorism perpetrated against civilians as a means of achieving political goals.” — Yasir Arafat²

- Not a terrorist?
- Not a murder? Not a violent man?

It reminds me of another famous statement where someone denied reality: “I am not a crook.” — who was that? Former US President, Richard Nixon

It is possible to think you are one thing when you are really another.

- It is possible to think you are a Jew but, according to God, you are not a Jew.
- It is possible to think you are a Christian but, according to God, you are not a Christian.

Don’t answer this out loud: Do you think you are a Christian?

Why?

II. The reality of true conversion based on an inner spiritual transformation (29a)

In our text, we are talking about the ‘true Jew’. There is a ‘true Jew’ who is, spiritually speaking, on the same level as a ‘true Christian’.

² *New York Times* - Quote of the day, 4/14/02

King David would be a good example of this. All the heroes of faith in the Old Testament would be good examples of this.

These truths are going to apply to ‘true Christians’ also.

A. In the hidden or secret parts, *i.e.*, inwardly [‘in the crypt’]

1. The realm is spiritual
2. The reality of ‘Jewishness’ (Christian-ness) is in the inner man, not merely external

This describes the realm of true spiritual life.

B. Of the heart

1. The image is one of circumcision, as if the heart has a shell over it that must be cut off
2. God described this through Moses in his farewell sermon to Israel (Dt 30.6)
 - a. Moses gives the alternatives (Dt 30.15)
 - b. Moses calls the people of Israel to choose life (Dt 30.19-20)
3. The same call comes through Jeremiah (Jer 4.4, 14)

C. By the Spirit

1. In the New Testament, the word ‘spirit’ often causes debate
 - a. Is it my own human spirit that is meant?
 - b. Is it a ‘spirit’; an attitude?
 - c. Is it the Holy Spirit
2. Here, it probably is the Holy Spirit, and should be capitalized

“The contrast is that between the Holy Spirit and the law as externally administered, a contrast between the life-giving power which the Holy Spirit imparts and the impotence which belongs to the law as mere law.”³

3. The reality of one’s spiritual testimony as a ‘true Jew’ or a ‘true Christian’ depends on the heart-circumcision by the Holy Spirit

³ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 89.

D. Not by the letter

1. The apostle is not disparaging the Law here
2. The apostle is speaking of someone who merely by keeping the external rites of the 'letter', *i.e.*, the inspired Scriptures, supposes that these externals are enough

I asked you earlier, Do you think you are a Christian?
Why?

- If you think you are a Christian because you are baptized, you need to think again.
- If you think you are a Christian because you prayed a prayer at some point in your life, you need to think again.
- If you think you are a Christian because you go to church, you need to think again.

True Christianity, just like true Judaism in the Old Dispensation, depends on an inner working of the Holy Spirit, making an inner transformation that is evident in the outward life.

III. The consequent possession of divine approval based on spiritual change (29b)

A. The name Jew = Praise

1. Jew is short for Judah
2. Judah means praise

It is ironic in this section where Paul is finding the Jew guilty before God that he closes with these words – it is not the praise of men that one should be after, but the praise of God.

Does God praise the Jew?

B. The Jewish dependence on outward appearances amounted to the praise of men

1. The Jewish Rabbis spent their time analyzing the external behaviours of men to determine what was right and wrong

2. The Talmud, the Mishna, all the writings of the Jews collected over centuries codified righteous behaviour in order to obtain (they thought) God's approval

I think I told you a while back about 'kosher' handicapped scooters, didn't I?

There is a company that manufactures electric scooters for elderly and handicapped people. You have seen them around, people use them all the time.

Kosher scooters are unique. They can be programmed so that you don't have to flip a switch on the Sabbath. You just sit in the seat of the Scooter and after a bit of delay, it will start by itself.

- "A toggle switch changes operation from normal to Shabbat mode. With no throttle lever activation by the rider, the module's timing circuit sets the chair in motion after 7-11 seconds, satisfying the "no work" Sabbath restriction."⁴

You see, even with Judaism today, it is all about outward appearances.

- And they praise one another for what they are able to do: See, we have kept God's law, we are approved of God!

If you are living for the praise of men, you will depend on outward religion and say you are not condemned by God.

- C. The man who has the inner transformation, the true circumcision, that man has God's approval

1. It is God's approval that matters in the end.
2. It is God's 'well done', God's 'this is my beloved Son' that matters

I asked you twice now: Do you think you are a Christian?

Why?

⁴ Shabbat Amigo <http://www.myamigo.com/common/amishabbat.aspx> (Accessed 11.24.2008)

Conclusion:

If your religion is external only, if you think you are not under the condemnation that *all* men face because you are religious, you don't understand the Bible.

You don't understand God.

You might not even be a Christian.

Salvation is

Not by Rite – not by the performance of Religious Ritual

Not by Power – not by the effort of Human Morality

but by My Spirit – only by the inner working of the Holy Spirit in response to a true heart cry of faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation.

Is your religion real? Are you truly born again?