

## Romans: A Solid Foundation for Christian Living

### Message 10: For the Spiritually Comfortable

Text: Romans 2:1-11

Do you have religion, or do you have faith? That's the question I'll be asking this morning as we look at Romans 2:1-11. It's sort of like asking "Is it live, or is it Memorex?" Some of us are old enough to remember that commercial. Jazz great Ella Fitzgerald is in a studio, and there's a Champaign class to the side. She hits the note, and the glass shatters. We then see nothing more than a new glass. Again we hear the note, and again the glass breaks. And this time we're asked, "Is it live, or is it Memorex?" Is it the real Ella, or did we just hear the playback – an artificial reproduction of the real thing?" The point of the commercial, of course, was that their brand of tape recorded sounds so clearly that they are as close to the real thing as you could get.

This morning I wonder how many settle for an artificial reproduction rather than the real thing when it comes to their faith. And so I ask this morning, do you have a real, genuine faith in the Lord Jesus – a faith that opens your life to the wonderful grace of our magnificent Lord; or do you simply have religion, church, ritual, activity. Don't get me wrong. Religion is important, as an expression of genuine faith and as a means by which one discovers the faith. But woe to anyone who gets comfortable with religion alone.

This is the issue faced by the apostle Paul in Romans 2:1-11. To bring you up-to-date, Paul is writing the Roman church – a church he did not start nor had he yet visited – both to strengthen them in their faith and to present the gospel to others who do not know Christ. His key point is in ch. 1, vs. 16, where he says, "*I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes; first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.*" From there, he concludes chapter 1 with a telling description of the dark and sinful heart of humanity which warrants the wrath of God, and which explains why we need God's saving grace in the first place.

But when we get to chapter 2, there's something else going on. Listen to what the word of God says, and then I'll explain (read).

As I said, in ch. 2 of Romans, there is something different in Paul's communication. Let's see if this helps you to see it. From the content of this letter, many scholars believe that, though it is located in the capitol of the Gentile world, the Roman church at the time Paul wrote was mainly Jewish. This would fit with the theory that it was started by Jews who lived in Rome, traveled to Jerusalem for Pentecost, and were saved on that day recorded in Acts 2 when the Spirit came down upon His church.

Now think about it. Jews and Gentiles in Rome might have gotten along better than those in Jerusalem, but if they maintained their Jewish identity

then they still clung to the distinction. Now the Jews were, and still are, God's chosen people. But throughout their history they had a problem of believing that this status was enough to save them. They had religion. They had ritual. But many did not have faith.

Now, come to Romans. In ch. 1 Paul is going right along describing how sinful the world is. And his description is primarily that of the Gentile world. And so these Jews are thinking, "That's right Paul. Go on man. Preach it. Show them how it is." They're comfortable. They think that, because they are Jews, they've got it all right. But then Paul comes to chapter 2, and says, "Hey you Jews. You too have no excuse." "*You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.*" Vs. 5: "*Because of the stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself...*"

Do you understand what's happening? Paul says, "It's not only the pagans and godless who are deserving of God's wrath. It's the religions, too. And so we come back to our question, do you have faith, or do you have religion?"

Or think about this one: what do you do if you are comfortable with religion? What can you do if you assess your life according to God's word and discover that you may have religion as opposed to real faith? Paul answers this question by giving us three truths to remember.

#### 1. Remember that sin is everybody's problem.

Vs. 1-3: "*Do you think you will escape God's judgment?*"

Many Jews trusted in their Jewishness to save them. They looked down at Gentiles as inferior. They would not be surprised by anything Paul wrote in ch. 1, no matter how grievous the act, because they were Gentile. And sometimes we do the same thing. I know people who can spend hours talking about how bad off the world is. They will condemn the abortionist, the sexual libertines, liberals of all kinds. And they might even be right. But what they don't do is look at their own hearts.

But look at vs. 1: "*You have no excuse... you condemn yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.*" What does Paul mean? Is he saying that they committed the very same acts as the Gentiles? Maybe (see ch. 1, vs. 29-32). Notice how Paul slips some of these in.

But there's more. Paul's main point is not that the Jews are guilty of Gentile immorality. It's they they too are guilty of sin. And at its heart, sin is the same. Paul says in Romans 1:23, "*they exchanged the glory of the*

*immortal God for images...*” And so, while their sin might have looked different, in reality they were just as guilty as the Gentiles.

Sin is everybody’s problem. It is universal. What this means is that religion nor heritage, nor anything other than the grace of God can save us. When we get too comfortable with our religion, we need to remember this.

### **2. Remember that God holds those who know more accountable.**

Vs. 2: *“We know that God’s judgment on those who do such things is based on truth.”* Vs. 5: *“You are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of judgment.”* Vs. 6: *“God will give to each person according to what he has done.”*

Paul says that the Jews were storing up wrath upon themselves. What does he mean? Well, while the Gentiles were deserving God’s wrath, there is a greater accountability for the Jews, for they had the full revelation of God. They didn’t just know God from creation. They had the Law and the Prophets. They had a faith that had been passed down for generations. But they had rejected it. They ignored the truth, settling for religion. Because of this, Paul says that there is a greater accountability for them than for the Gentiles.

What does this mean for us? It means that, however bad off this world may be, before we go too far condemning the world’s sin, we had better deal with our own. Those who know have the full revelation of God as seen in the Christian church will be held to a higher accountability than those who do not.

1 Peter 4:17: *“For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?”*

We had better make sure that we do not merely have religion, but that we have an authentic faith in Jesus Christ.

### **3. Remember that God’s kindness is meant to draw you to Him.**

Vs. 4: *“Or do you show contempt for the riches of His kindness, tolerance, and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness leads you toward repentance?”*

The Jews believed that God’s blessing was proof that they were safe. But in reality, it was a display of love meant to draw them back to Him.

Do we make the same mistake today? We look at the blessings that God has given our country, and even our church, and get comfortable? Maybe we need to look at these things in a different light.

God blesses His people so that they will see His glory and love Him. The more of His kindness we receive, the more humility and repentance we should show. And this is a major difference between religion and faith.

### **Conclusion:**

Sin is everybody’s problem. And God holds those who know His truth even more accountable for it. His kindness and tolerance is not an affirmation of our religion or our standing with Him. It is a reflection of His love, meant to draw us to love, honor, and worship Him. Think about these for a moment. And if you sense in your spirit that you have been comfortable with mere religion, as opposed to a genuine faith relationship with the Lord, ponder that too for a moment.

The good news is that no one has to settle for religion alone. We don’t have to be like the Roman Jews. See, the answer to religion is grace. It is to stop trusting in the activity or label and begin trusting in the grace of God. See, while religion alone leads to wrath, the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of those who believe.”

Perhaps this morning you need to reaffirm your commitment to the gospel...

Perhaps today you need to truly believe in this gospel...