



Religious Trappings

Romans 2:17-24

1. Don't Trust in Your Heritage (verses 17-18).

2. Don't Trust in Your Learning (verses 19-24).

It is a great blessing to grow up in a Christian home. It is a great blessing to grow up in a home where mom and dad love each other; where a dad models loving leadership and a mom is happy; where the fear of the Lord is taught; where peace reigns; where the Bible is read; where Scriptures are memorized; where prayers are prayed; where the gospel is believed; where the Lord is sought in good times and bad; where children are loved and accepted; where children are disciplined and taught the ways of the Lord; where Christian friends dominate the social circle; where activities center around people, not things; where the language is edifying, not tearing down; where brothers and sisters are best friends; where laughter and joy is constant. It is hard to overestimate the effect that such a household will have on the life of a child. The blessings are innumerable.

That's why the hymn-writer wrote the following prayer (#451):

O give us homes built firm upon the Saviour,
Where Christ is Head, and Counsellor and Guide;
Where ev'ry child is taught His love and favor
And gives his heart to Christ, the crucified:
How sweet to know that tho' his footsteps waver
His faithful Lord is walking by his side!

O give us homes with godly fathers, mothers,
Who always place their hope and trust in Him;
Whose tender patience turmoil never bothers,
Whose calm and courage trouble cannot dim;
A home where each finds joy in serving others,
And love still shines, tho' days be dark and grim.

O give us homes where Christ is Lord and Master,
The Bible read, the precious hymns still sung;
Where prayer comes first in peace or in disaster,
And praise is natural speech to ev'ry tongue;
Where mountains move before a faith that's vaster,
And Christ sufficient is for old and young.

O Lord, our God, our homes are Thine forever!
We trust to Thee their problems, toil, and care;
Their bonds of love no enemy can sever
If Thou art always Lord and Master there:
Be Thou the center of our least endeavor:
Be Thou our Guest, our hearts and homes to share. [\[1\]](#)

And if you have known the experience of such a home, you ought to be thankful to God for the great blessings in your life. You ought to be thankful to God that he has been so kind to you as to give you such a home.

But with these blessings come some unique dangers. Those reared in Christian homes default to a moral life, where one's need for God isn't quite so evident. Those reared in Christian homes come to know much about God, which might easily mask a true knowledge of God. Those reared in Christian homes know how to talk like a Christian, when, in fact, their hearts are rebellious against the Lord. Those reared in Christian homes know how to act like a Christian, when, in fact, it's only their environment that is keeping them in check. And though they may look righteous on the outside, they are lost and far from God.

Jesus demonstrated this danger when he told the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. He said, ...

Luke 18:10-14

"Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

The difference between these two men couldn't have been greater. The one was righteous, and the other was not. The one was schooled in the law, and the other was not. The one had walked in obedience, and the other had not. The one was confident before God, and the other was not. The one knew how to pray, and the other one did not.

I want for you to think about this prayer of the Pharisee, because there are many commendable things about the prayer. He was thankful. He was thankful to God for the blessings in his life.

He was thankful to God for his righteous upbringing. He was thankful to God for his hand of protection upon his life, that he wasn't drawn away into a wicked life. He was not drawn into a life of extortion or unrighteousness or adultery or even a life of a tax collector. No, God had protected him from these things. And all of these things are good things! And he recognizes that they have come from the hand of God. And was thankful. Yet, his thankfulness reveals a heart of pride.

The Pharisee prided himself on his commitment to live a life of obedience to the Lord. He was fasting twice a week. He was supporting the temple work with his finances. And Jesus said that he was lost and far from God. Jesus said that the tax collector who knew his sin and pleaded for mercy was the one who went away from the temple that day justified in the sight of God.

And what was true in the days of Jesus is true in our days as well. Oh the clothing may change. And the location may change. But, the message is still the same. Be careful of being proud of your religious upbringing.

And so, here's the trick. For those of you who have experienced (or are experiencing) the blessing of a Christian home, be thankful to God for his kindness to you. It is appropriate to thank him for all of the blessings in your life. And a religious heritage is of great value to your soul. Oh, but beware of the dangers that such a blessing can bring to your life. Stay away from the religious trappings that can so easily entangle you.

My message this morning is entitled: Religious Trappings. It comes from Romans, chapter 2 and verses 17 through 29, because this is what we see in our text. We see religious people trapped in the dangers of their blessings.

The trappings of religious people are different than the trappings of non-religious people who have no moral compass. You don't trap a bear with a mouse-trap. Nor do you trap a snake with a bear-trap.

Romans 2:17-29

But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law; and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth— you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

Verse 17 is a turn in the book of Romans. For the first time, he addresses the Jew. Look again in verse 17, ...

Romans 2:17

But if you call yourself a Jew ...

He is going to show how those trapped in religion are lost. Back in chapter 1 and beginning in verse 18, Paul showed how the non-religious person was lost in his sin. Lost, because he knows of God through creation. Lost, because he refuses to honor God or give thanks (1:21).

And beginning in chapter 2, Paul turns to the moral person--the one not caught in the obvious, outward sins of the pagans, the one who is able to judge the sins of another. Paul showed how this one was lost in his sin. Lost because he has a conscience. Lost because he knows right from wrong. Lost because he knows that he does wrong.

And now, beginning in chapter 2 and verse 17, we see Paul going after the Jew.

Romans 2:17

But if you call yourself a Jew ...

My first point is this:

1. Don't Trust in Your Heritage (verses 17-18)

You can sense the pride in those whom Paul is accusing. They are taking the name, "Jew" proudly. "Yes! I am a Jew! Named after the tribe of Judah! We are God's chosen people! God made the promises to Abraham and his offspring! We are his offspring. We are the objects of God's blessing! We are God's favored people!"

This is in contrast with today, where the name, "Jew" is often a bad name. It is a name scorned by many. In fact, if you use the word, "Jew," today in some contexts, it comes across as a racial slur.

But not so when Paul uses it here. Paul is here appealing to all of the racial pride bound up in the Jews. You can hear the pride in verses 17 and 18, ...

Romans 2:17-18

But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law;

All of these things are good things. It is good to rely upon the law. "Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act." (Psalm 37:5). It is good to boast in God. "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God." (Psalm 20:7). It is good to know the will of God. As the Psalmist says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105). It is good to approve what is excellent. "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." (Philippians 4:8). It is good to be instructed from the law. "Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it." (Psalm 119:35).

All of these things are good! It is good to be a man of the Word! It is good to boast in the Lord. It is good to submit yourself to the will of the Lord. It is good to be a student of the Scriptures. The problem comes when this becomes your trust.

And there are many people in this world who trust in their heritage. They trust in the goodness of their family. They trust in their standing in the community. They trust in the identity of their religion.

I can't tell you how many people that I have spoken with over the years who identify themselves with some particular denomination. I begin to speak with them about the things of the Lord, and they what religion are you? I often say, "I'm a Bible-believing Christian." And they say, "Well, I'm a Methodist" or "I'm a Catholic" or "I'm a Presbyterian." And when it comes to the condition of their soul, they seem to entrust it to the religious authority within their denomination. And they often seem to take pride in these things even though they make little difference in their lives.

In fact, on a number of occasions (five or six times) I have spoken to people about Christ, and they have brought up their grandparents! "Oh yes," they say, "my grandfather was a preacher," as if that benefits them. This is just the same as saying, "My grandmother was a secretary, and my grandfather was a janitor." It has no bearing on my own life.

In fact, this past summer, we had an accident with one of our cars. While it was in the shop, insurance covered the rental car. And a guy came from the shop to take me over to the rental place. And in the five-minute drive, I was able to transition the conversation to spiritual things. And taking great pride, he said, "My grandmother is into the religious thing. She's a preacher." I asked if it was making any difference in his life. He said, "No."

And right here is the danger. Right here is the religious trapping--to trust in your religious heritage. To think that this guy would be so quick to bring up the faith of his grandmother! He has some misplaced trust. He's trusting in his religious heritage.

And how many untold millions are in America and around the world, who would identify themselves as "Christian," but have little understanding of what that means. This past week I did a bit of research. [\[2\]](#) In 2014 a major survey was conducted. It found that 70% of Americans identify themselves as "Christian." Now, that's 50% Protestant and 20% Catholic. That's down from 78% only 7 years before. That's a lot of people in the United States of America trusting in their heritage.

And don't think that it can't happen to you. Children, you can easily grow up trusting in your heritage at Rock Valley Bible Church. You may call yourself a "Bible-believing Christian," and still be lost in your sin. You may even say, "I grew up at Rock Valley Bible Church, where we believe the Bible. The pastor preaches long sermons! 'Bible' is our middle name! I was there every Sunday, and I learned so much! I know that God is good. He has been so good to me. I'm thankful for my family. I'm thankful for my religious upbringing. I'm thankful that I learned the Bible so well as a youth."

"Well and good!" says the apostle Paul. But, don't trust in the blessings of God in your life. Those things won't merit anything before the Lord.

When standing before the Lord, God isn't going to ask you about your religious heritage. God isn't going to ask you about what church you attended, unless it's to condemn you. As we learned last week, ...

Romans 2:13

It is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.

And that's right where Paul heads in verse 19. He says, "OK, you have a great blessing growing up Jewish! That's wonderful! But what did you do with your religious heritage. Did you put it into action?"

Too often, people trust in what they know. Here's the second religious trapping.

2. Don't Trust in Your Learning (verses 19-24)

It's found in verses 19-24. But really, we need to get a running start again in verse 17, as it is all one long thought!

Romans 2:17-24

But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law; and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth— you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

You want to summarize all of this? Hypocrisy! The Jews had all of the advantage that one could ask for as it relates to God. They were the people of God. They were trusting in the law. They knew the will of God. They were guides to the blind. They were the lights to those in darkness. They were the instructors of the foolish. They were the teachers of children. They had the "embodiment of knowledge and truth" (verse 20). They had great learning! They were poised to be great teachers!

And what did they do? They were teaching others (sure enough), but they were not teaching themselves (verse 21). This is the essence of hypocrisy. Jesus said to these same Jews, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! ... Woe to you, blind guides!" (Matthew 23:13, 16)

The imagery is stunning. A blind man needs a guide who can see the way. But, if the man leading is blind, himself, woe to them. Jesus said, "If a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit" (Matthew 15:14).

And the Jews were blind. They were blind to their own sin. They were preaching against stealing, while doing the same. They were preaching against adultery, while committing the same. They were preaching against idolatry, while involved in the same. They were preaching the glories of the law, while breaking it at the same time. This is the epitome of hypocrisy. Calling people to live to some sort of standard when you, yourself, aren't living it.

How many pastors have been caught embezzling the church's money? I did a Google search, "pastor embezzling" and came up with the following headlines: "Former pastor accused of embezzling won't get jail time." "Singapore Court Finds Pastor Guilty of \$35 Million Fraud" "Pastor's wife charged with embezzling from church in Kingsport." "George pastor stole \$250,000 in donations from his church"

How many pastors have been caught in adultery (or run off with the secretary)? I would say, "Probably too numerous to count."

And when it comes to idolatry, pastors may preach against it. And yet, they can easily have a love for the world and the things in the world. I say this to my own shame. The lures of the world hold plenty of attraction in my own heart, whether it's sports or technology or comfort. And too often, pastors are known for breaking the very same law that they preach.

It's no wonder that the world looks on, and says, "f that's what it means to be a Christian, then I want nothing of it." When people think of Christianity, they think it's a sham. They think that it's a blind man leading a bunch of other blind men to destruction. This is exactly what Paul says in verse 24, ...

Romans 2:24

For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

This quote is from the Greek translation of Isaiah 52:5. Essentially, it has to do with the "people of God" not remaining under the blessing of God. As they were unfaithful, they were removed from the land. And it brought reproach against the LORD, their God.

And if you read Isaiah, you know that the people were defeated because of their sin! And their sin was a reflection of their God. And when 70% of Americans self-profess to be Christians, their actions speak louder than their words. With 70% of our nation saying that they follow after God, then why is abortion still legal in our land? Why is the entertainment industry so sexual? Why is our government so full of over-spending? Why is the divorce rate so high in our country? Why do we have lotteries and slot machines? These things are simply instruments to exploit the poor. Why is pornography so rampant in our society?

If the 70% would rise up against any one of these issues, they would simply go away. Abortion would be gone. When professing Christians would simply refuse to watch rated R movies, Hollywood couldn't fund itself on 30% of the population.

The morality of our nation gives reason for non-Christians to blaspheme God. "Is this what a 'Christian' nation looks like?" This is one of the reasons the Muslim nations give for hating America - we are a sinful society.

So far, I have kept my application to pastors, because their sin is more public and more obvious to all. And because they go on record as preaching against sin. But Paul doesn't keep it there with religious teachers. He comes in verse 24 to speak to all of the Jews, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you." He doesn't say, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of your spiritual leaders, the scribes and Pharisees." No, it's because of everyone who takes the name, "Jew."

And so, I want to bring the application down to you. That's why I framed my point as I did. Here's the second religious trapping. Don't Trust in Your Learning (verses 19-24) That is, don't trust in the things that you have come to know and to believe if you aren't practicing them, yourself.

Because, as a representative of Christ, the world is watching you. It is watching you to see if you really believe the things that you say you believe. And, believe me, there is nothing that the world wants more than to disprove your faith by your actions, because it gets them off the hook.

And nobody is watching as much as your children are. You say that you shouldn't steal. Are you stealing? Are you honest with your employer's time? If the receipt rings up wrong in your favor, do you correct the cashier? Are there possessions in your house that rightly belong to someone else? You say that you shouldn't commit adultery. Are you committing adultery? I have no knowledge that there are any here who are engaged in an adulterous relationship. But, it might be the case. And if your sin comes to light, it's yet another reason for the world to blaspheme.

But there are other ways that the world can blaspheme the Lord because of you. When your talk at work is no different than the talk of the world. When your eyes wander where they shouldn't wander. When any relationship with the opposite sex is inappropriate. You say that idols are wrong, but are you engaged in idol worship yourself? What fills your mind? What fills your heart? What fills your talk? If the truth were fully known, we would all know our guilt.

The antidote to hypocrisy is confession and the gospel. Because of the gospel, confession brings forgiveness of sins.

Romans 4:7-8

"Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,
and whose sins are covered;
blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin."

This is where true blessing comes--when our sins are forgiven. We thank God for the great ways he has blessed us. But nothing is greater than having our sins forgiven.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on November 27, 2016 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] Hart, Barbara. "A Christian Home."

[2] <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>