

"Hypocrisy Gets an Audit"

Romans 2:17-29

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July 14, 2019

connect groups

PATH

All businesses, corporations, and individuals have blind spots. Auditors can help by giving a clear and unbiased reading of practices and procedures, and then give appropriate recommendations for change. Here, Paul played the role of auditing the hypocrite—the one who has spiritual style but no substance.

I. The Assets

- A. The Right Background (v. 17)
- B. The Right Book (v. 18)
- C. The Right Business (vv. 19-20)

II. The Deficits

- A. The Wrong Practice (vv. 21-23)
- B. The Wrong Prominence (v. 24)
- C. The Wrong Perspective (vv. 25-28)

III. The Net Appraisal (v. 29)

POINTS

The Assets

- The Right Background (v. 17)
 - Paul addressed the Jews who thought their religious background was their salvation. The Jews are God's chosen people—marked out among all nations.
 - Paul identified himself as a "Hebrew of Hebrews" (Philippians 3:5 ESV), and he praised his audience for their great spiritual heritage. However, a good thing can become a bad thing when it keeps you from the best thing—God.
- The Right Book (v. 18)
 - God gave His Word—the Old Testament, including the Law of Moses—to the Jews (see Romans 3:2). Jewish children studied the Scriptures from an early age: the Shema (from Deuteronomy 6:4-5); the Hallel (the ascension songs of Psalms 113-118); reading and writing the Torah; bat/bar mitzvah at twelve and thirteen (girls and boys, respectively).
- The Right Business (vv. 19-20)
 - Paul noted that the Jews had been guides, instructors, and teachers. This was always God's plan for the

Jews. God chose them, which gave them a responsibility to bring His light to the world.

- However, the Jews ultimately failed in that responsibility, so Jesus became the Servant of God (see Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-7; 52:13-53:12).

The Deficits

- The Wrong Practice (vv. 21-23)
 - The Jews had not practiced what they preached.
 - Jesus spoke of that danger: "Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46).
- The Wrong Prominence (v. 24)
 - The Jews were known for the wrong reason; their hypocrisy was giving God a bad name. Paul called them out just as Nathan had called David out (see 2 Samuel 12:14).
 - When Christians behave badly, nonbelievers write God off.
- The Wrong Perspective (vv. 25-28)
 - Circumcision was an outward mark of the dedication of a male child to God—a ritual that pointed to a reality. The Jews viewed this ritual

as a means of salvation; therefore Paul and Peter emphasized that salvation is by faith alone (see Acts 15).

- When archaeologist Howard Carter discovered King Tut's tomb, he found caskets within caskets—all of them inlaid with gold. However, beneath the exquisite gold death mask was only a withered mummy; some people cover spiritual darkness with gold—this is what Jesus called a whitewashed tomb (see Matthew 23:27).

The Net Appraisal (v. 29)

- A true believer is someone "whose praise is not from men but from God" (v. 29). It doesn't matter what other people think about you—only what God thinks of you.
- Jesus spoke of the narrow road—the path of faith which causes us to depend on Him completely and obey His words (see Matthew 7:13-14). Some who call themselves Christians will be shocked when Jesus tells them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness" (Matthew 7:23).

PRACTICE

Connect Up: Jesus criticized the Jewish religious leaders for hypocrisy—their failure to put their knowledge and privilege as God's chosen people into true practice in their hearts and lives. It's important to ask God to show us any ways in which we have been hypocritical. How can we know a true believer from a counterfeit? Here are some key ways to spot a true believer:

- True believers' hearts are changed forever (see Jeremiah 32:39), and that changed heart results in a changed life (see Psalm 119:6). True believers seek Christ (see Luke 10:42) and submit to God's righteousness (see Romans 10:3).

Connect In: It's important to make sure that we are living what we teach before we address any sin outside the church. Remember what Jesus said about removing the plank from your own eye before you tell someone about the speck in theirs (see Matthew 7:3-5). As Peter said about Christian house cleaning, "The time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God" (1 Peter 4:17). Let grace be the rule as you deal with what you see in God's house.

Connect Out: Christianity is not invalidated by the bad behavior of a few members—Jesus is the standard of integrity. Rather than looking for hypocrisy in others, take a serious look at your own behavior this week. Is there something you have been doing that might cause unbelievers to disregard God? Consider the areas Paul warned about: being self-righteous or criticizing someone for something you've done yourself. Ask God for the opportunity to make things right, and wisdom in how to make things right.