

Romans: Verse-By-Verse

Romans 2:17-20

Student Notes

To this point: Paul has primarily been dealing with the moralizers of his day – most likely the Gentile moralizers – since in the next set of verses he addresses the Jews rather pointedly.

The verses that follow: From a more general critique of the moralizers to a specific set of arguments against those who claim Jewish ancestry and the Law as their particular self-confidence.

The Main Point: The Law and Circumcision do not provide the Jews immunity from judgment; they face the same wrath as the Gentiles.

- **Eight Descriptions Of Jewish Self-confidence and consciousness:**

v. 17 “You call yourself a Jew

v. 17 “You rely on the law.”

v. 17 “You brag about your relationship to God.”

v. 18 “You know his will.

v. 18 “You approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law.”

v. 19 “You are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark.”

v. 20 “You are an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants

v. 20 “You have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth...”

- **The Deeper Emphasis:**

1. **“You call yourself a Jew.”**

This comes first in any list dealing with Jewish self-consciousness and self-assessment. In calling oneself a “Jew” the emphasis is upon the pride of the chosen people’s name.”

- John the Baptist and the Religious Leaders: -- Matthew 3:7-10
- Jesus and the Religious Leaders: - John 8:39-41

Note: Jesus is calling for actions that prove their true relationship to God. (Genealogy is not enough).

2. **“You rely on the Law.”**

The greater meaning is that the Jews relied on the Law given at Sinai, and trusted in it as a possession. They believed the mere possession of the Law would serve as a shield against judgment.

A parallel thought: To “hear the Law” is the same as practicing the Law. See: James 1:22-24

3. **“You brag about your relationship to God.” (17)·**

The Greek phrase is identical with the climax of Paul’s portrayal of Christians who have been justified by faith. Paul writes, “We rejoice in God.” -- Romans 5:11.

Paul highlights the Jew’s pride in their monotheism and in their supposed monopoly on God.

4. **“You know his will.”**

Greek: “The Will”, meaning the Jews claimed to know God’s superior will – superior to all other revelation. Main Point: Taking pride in knowing God’s revelation but not applying it.

5. “You approve of what is superior”.

Parallel to Philippians 1:9-10: “And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ...”

The Jews tested God’s revelation against others and found it superior. They have approved of those revelations that have proven superior to others.

6. “You are instructed by the Law”.

The Jew believes he has great moral discernment because he has been instructed by the Law. The instruction by the Law has not produced God’s morality: It is instruction for the sake of instruction.

7. “You are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark...”

A consequence of the Jewish instruction in that Law is that they believed they were competent to instruct others. Paul is zeroing in on the pride of the Law. Having been instructed in the Law the Jews now see themselves as instructors of the blind (non-Jews).

See Jesus’ warning in Luke 6:41-42

8. “You are an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth...”

Adding to the previous statement ... not only do the Jews believe themselves to be teachers of the blind Gentiles, but instructors of the foolish and infants. This could be applied to both Jewish subjects or Gentile proselytes. The pride is that the Law is allegedly the full embodiment of knowledge and truth.

The Reality: The Law was a shadow of the real thing: The Law is the type ... the Gospel is the antitype – the fullest extension of God's purposes.

Paul is about to turn the tables on his imaginary opponent.

He will show how they may have all of this knowledge, but they did not live up to it. Their knowledge actually becomes their judgment.

We will see that next time.