

## The Fruit of Hypocrisy

Romans 2:17-29

Key Verse: 29

*“No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man’s praise is not from men, but from God.”*

A couple of days ago I heard that Monica Lewinsky is going to be writing a book about her experiences at the White House. When I heard that story, I was reminded of the dark days in 1998 when the news broke out about President Bill Clinton’s sex scandal and he made his famous speech denying the allegations. It was later proved that Clinton’s escapades not only involved Lewinsky but many other women as well. And the reason I bring this up is because of something else that happened while all this was going on. Reverend Jesse Jackson bravely dove into the media storm and made a high profile visit to the President to offer moral counseling. Being a reverend you would guess that he went there to help the President with spiritual guidance. Jackson brought along one of his staff, Karin Stanford, who was visibly pregnant at the time. In an ironic twist of fate, it was later found out, that Rev. Jesse Jackson was the father of her child. To try to cover up his “little error,” the good reverend used organizational money to arrange for his playmate to live in a home worth \$345,000 and to receive \$10,000 per month. Because Jesse Jackson is a darling of the liberal media, the magnitude of his hypocrisy was quickly lost by the press when it declared the whole affair resolved. Sometimes life is better than fiction for you couldn’t have written a better example of hypocrisy if you tried. A reverend goes to counsel another man on the perils of adultery while at the same time taking his pregnant mistress along - if there were an award for hypocrisy, surely Jackson would be strong contender. In today’s passage Paul talks about this issue with the Roman Christians. Jesse Jackson wasn’t the first hypocrite and he won’t be the last, for in some ways all of us are hypocrites.

Paul was writing this letter to the church in Rome. It was during the time of the Roman Emperor Nero and the church was made up mostly of Gentiles but there was also a number of Jewish Christians in the congregation as well. In this section, Paul is addressing an issue that has to do with the Jews. In order to understand this passage a little better we have to go back in history, just a few years, to about the year 1446 B.C. This was the time of the Exodus, when Moses led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt in search of the Promised Land. It had been three months since the Israelites left Egypt and they were camped in the desert in front of Mt. Sinai when God said to Moses, “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, <sup>6</sup> you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.” (Ex 1:5-6) Wow what a tremendous promise and precious privilege God poured out on the Israelites. One day they were nothing but a bunch of slaves, and the next day they were God’s treasured possession. And out of all nations on earth, God chose the Israelites. To show his love, God went before them during the day in a pillar of cloud giving them shade from the hot desert sun. And he was with them by night in a pillar of fire to keep them warm in the cold desert night. Not only that, the Israelites were the only nation that God gave his revelation to. God’s word protected his

people, gave them wisdom and helped them to be unique in the entire world. God's dietary laws protected his people from eating hazardous food. God's moral laws protected his people from harmful spiritual influences. Having God's law was a privilege and if they kept that law by obeying it completely, without breaking their contract, then they would continue to be God's treasured possession.

Initially the Israelites were humble and thankful for God's love and provision but that lasted about a week. They began to grumble and complain having a sense of entitlement. However they did their best to obey God's commands but over the course of time, they began to take pride in the fact that they were God's chosen people, and they were the only ones to know God's law. Eventually they even began to take pride in their ability to obey their laws. So Paul writes this letter to address their cultural pride and reveal their hypocrisy.

Let's take a closer look at what was going on in verses 17-21, "Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God; <sup>18</sup> if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; <sup>19</sup> if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, <sup>20</sup> an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth—" In these verses it's clear that by now these people had developed a superiority complex. They thought that they were the privileged insiders to God's revelation. They were connoisseurs of the best things of God and the only ones who were informed on the latest doctrines. They had become like spiritual celebrities. They had convinced themselves that they were the only ones qualified to guide others and that they were the enlightened ones able to lead those who were in the dark. They thought so highly of themselves because they had been trusted with the knowledge of the truth and everyone else were fools and children who had to be instructed.

And the sad thing was, it was kind of true. For they really were God's chosen people and he hoped that His law would go out from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. (Isa 2:3) God hoped that his people would bring the knowledge and love of God to the whole world. And that they would mature and grow to be his representatives and his hands and feet here on earth. God hoped that they would have his heart and be a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that they would declare the praises of God who called them out of darkness into his wonderful light and be shepherds for the lost people all around them. (1 Pe 2:9) But unfortunately they let their calling go to their heads, and instead of being full of love for others, their heads became puffed up with pride and instead of loving people, they looked down on them. (1 Cor 8:1) They were supposed to be priests of the world but they didn't reach out to help others instead they wanted to rule over them. God's word was given to them so that they could have a covenant relationship with God and discover the will of God however the Jews exalted themselves because of their knowledge of the law.

Their pride was bad enough but what was worse, was their hypocrisy, for they didn't even obey what they taught. Take a look at verses 21-23. "you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? <sup>22</sup> You who say that people

should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? <sup>23</sup> You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law?” The Jews took pleasure in teaching others, however they didn’t even listen to their own teaching. They would preach about the sin of stealing and when people weren’t looking, they stole from others. Or they would teach about the sin of adultery only to commit adultery themselves. And they taught against idols, but would rob pagan temple stealing the idols and melt them down and use the gold for themselves. Basically they became the biggest hypocrites of their time.

When their hypocrisy was exposed, the result was that God’s name was dishonored. Take a look at verse 24. “As it is written: “God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.” Instead of becoming God’s loving hands to the world, in the end their actions actually brought dishonor to God. The exact opposite of what God planned. Maybe they thought no one would find out about their hypocrisy, however we can’t keep hypocrisy hidden forever, eventually it will get discovered. Paul didn’t condemn their hypocrisy based on his own authority; he quoted their own Scriptures from the prophet Isaiah. (Isa 52:5) Not only did their hypocrisy dishonor God, it also caused the Gentiles to blaspheme God. The Gentiles may have reasoned, “Why should we honor God, when His Chosen People don’t even obey Him?”

When we look at the Jews, it’s easy for us to condemn them. However we have no room to talk because this continues to happen in our time with Christians. These days, one of the most common excuses that people make for not going to church, is that the church is full of hypocrites. And they are right. Whether you think it’s right or wrong, these days Christians have been stereo typed as bigoted, critical, self-righteous hypocrites. You might not agree, but there are some truth to stereo types. There is a new TV show out this year called, “The New Normal,” and on it the main character’s mother is a judgmental, critical Christian. When I first saw this, I was angry and criticized Hollywood for making such a TV show. But the problem is not Hollywood, because they only reflect what society has become, or is going toward.

Christians are the biggest group of hypocrites on the planet. And our response should be, “Yes we are. – And I thank God for his wonderful grace of forgiveness.” But so often our response is to deny it and try to cover it up like Jesse Jackson.

There are famous examples like this but what about our everyday examples? Like the person who has a Christian sticker on their cars and drive like a son of hell? What about the person who condemns another about adultery and then goes home to look at porn, or just looks at others lustfully? Or what about someone who talks about the grace of God in church and then is not graceful at work? Or what about the flipside of hypocrisy? How about the person who talks boldly about God in church, but is completely silent at work, or with his friends or family? I am guilty of all these and more, what about you?

The Jews thought that they could be righteous simply because of their heritage or ancestry but Paul pointed out that thinking like that was wrong. Take a look at verses 25-27.

“Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. <sup>26</sup> If those who are not circumcised keep the law’s requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? <sup>27</sup> The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker.” Some of the Jews depended on circumcision, or some other ritual, for their righteousness. But Paul taught that outward obedience to the law, circumcision or any other ritual only have value if it is accompanied by heartfelt obedience. In the Christian life, we can apply this principle to such rituals as baptism and communion. These were instituted by Jesus himself and appointed for our benefit. Yet they will only have value in our lives when they are done with faith and a commitment to make Christ the Lord of our lives. The temptation to substitute our outward actions for real heart change is always present. We are tempted to make ourselves look good in front of people but God sees the contents of one’s life, not our practice of rituals.

Let’s read verses 28 & 29. “A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. <sup>29</sup> No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man’s praise is not from men, but from God.” God is not concerned with outward appearances but always with our hearts. God longs for a real relationship with us, not some fake appearances in front of others. The problem occurs when we are seeking praise from men and not from God. If we are seeking the praise of men, in the end we will dishonor God through our hypocritical lives. However, when we repent and acknowledge our hypocrisy seeking praise from God, we can please our Heavenly Father and be a blessing to the people around us as well. May God bless you as you seek to please him this week.