

You Call Yourself a Christian!?

7.7.24

Romans Series

Message 10

Romans 2:17–24 (CSB)

¹⁷Now if you call yourself a Jew, and rely on the law, and boast in God, ¹⁸and know his will, and approve the things that are superior, being instructed from the law, ¹⁹and if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light to those in darkness, ²⁰an instructor of the ignorant, a teacher of the immature, having the embodiment of knowledge and truth in the law—²¹you then, who teach another, don't you teach yourself? You who preach, "You must not steal"—do you steal? ²²You who say, "You must not commit adultery"—do you commit adultery? You who detest idols, do you rob temples? ²³You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? ²⁴For, as it is written: **The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.**

Introduction: You call yourself a Christian!?

A. Growing up, I wasn't allowed to play any card game that used poker cards.

1. This was partly because of growing up in a Pentecostal home, and anything that resembled gambling was forbidden.

a. The other reason stemmed from my dad's family heritage, where my great-grandfather went to jail for killing a man over a card game, and another member worked on an old-school riverboat.

b. So we didn't play solitaire, poker, rummy or even spades if they used real playing cards.

c. It wasn't until I met Julie's family that I played card games.

d. And Pastor Ben Wolf taught me how to play spades.

2. But the ONE card game early Pentecostals played was called Rook.

a. Rook is kind of like spades and rummy put together with bidding and higher card wins the hand and any points in the hand.

b. At the beginning, you get to bid for trump and if you win the bid, you get to select the trump color.

c. The trump cards were the most powerful cards, and if played correctly, you could win most hands.

d. Something that I still haven't figured out is: why could I play a game that had cards and "bids", but because it had a bird picture, it was ok?

B. I've noticed that in our culture, anytime Christians do something that others don't like, they throw out the ultimate phrase: "And you call yourself a Christian..."

1. That phrase tells us that our actions do not align with what that person thinks is Christian behavior.

2. Here's the problem with trump cards or trump phrases: they change.

a. Just like in Rook, where the highest bidder chooses what color is trump, the world picks and chooses what they see is "Christian" behavior.

b. The Apostle Paul's argument in Romans 2 is kind of like pulling the ultimate trump card for the Jews by referring to the Law and circumcision.

3. The Law isn't a goalpost but an inflexible standard that breaks everyone because it cannot be perfectly kept and does not have the power to save.

C. It's hard to tell what, exactly, was happening in Rome or among Jewish believers that led Paul to write this, but he is adamant:

1. How can you call yourself a God-fearing, Law-keeping Jew when your behavior is so hypocritical?
2. If Paul was writing us a letter, it might ask: How can we claim to be Spirit-filled, born-again believers when our actions do not align with our profession of faith?

1. The Apostle Paul reminds the Jewish believers of their original purpose.

¹⁷Now if you call yourself a Jew, and rely on the law, and boast in God, ¹⁸and know his will, and approve the things that are superior, being instructed from the law, ¹⁹and if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light to those in darkness, ²⁰an instructor of the ignorant, a teacher of the immature, having the embodiment of knowledge and truth in the law...

A. The Jewish people were called and set apart for a purpose.

1. They were to be a nation of priests who pointed the world to the One True God.
2. God intended for the Jewish people to teach the world God's ways, to proclaim and preach the salvation found in the God of Israel, and to set an example for all of the nations.
3. This purpose began with Abraham in Genesis 12 and is explained and described in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

B. They were never really faithful to it, but after the Babylonian exile, up through the time of Jesus and Paul, they took this position far more seriously.

1. By Paul's day, Jews like Paul saw themselves as in an arrogant manner.
2. They used their rights and privileges as leverage.
3. **The danger of clear and powerful callings is the tendency to become conceited and arrogant.**

C. This is true today also:

1. Too often, a person who has a dramatic and clear call from God allows their confidence in the calling to become arrogant.
2. The Jewish people were very arrogant by this time:
3. They had the Law and the sign of covenant, circumcision, and acted like they were better than everyone else.

D. **Callings do not excuse hypocrisy.**

1. **Anointing does not excuse sin.**
2. The Apostle Paul points this out to them.
3. So what if you:
 - a. Call yourself a Jew, and rely on the Law, and boast in your relationship to God.
 - b. So what if you know God's will, and know what you should do.
 - c. So what if your relationship and knowledge makes you a guide for the blind (the confused, the lost, the hurting), so what if you can bring light to dark places and teach the ignorant.
4. The Apostle Paul doesn't deny the benefits, calling, or responsibilities of the Jewish people.

E. But he puts them in perspective.

²¹you then, who teach another, don't you teach yourself? You who preach, "You must not steal"—do you steal? ²²You who say, "You must not commit adultery"—do you commit adultery? You who detest idols, do you rob temples? ²³You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? ²⁴For, as it is written: **The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.**'

1. Paul declares that none of these good things matter if you violate the same Law you teach.
2. And if you teach a Law that you do not keep, you are a blasphemer and a hypocrite.
3. Or, as you might hear today: And you call yourself a Christian...

2. The Stench of Exile.

A. Did you notice in your Bible that the last sentence is in bold print?

1. The bold text is added to the English so we know this is an Old Testament quotation.
2. Paul quotes Isaiah 52 directly with Ezekiel 36:20-23 in mind.
3. The Ezekiel passage shows us what God was thinking:

Ezekiel 36:18–23 (CSB)

¹⁸So I poured out my wrath on them because of the blood they had shed on the land, and because they had defiled it with their idols. ¹⁹I dispersed them among the nations, and they were scattered among the countries. I judged them according to their conduct and actions. ²⁰When they came to the nations where they went, they profaned my holy name, because it was said about them, 'These are the people of the LORD, yet they had to leave his land in exile.'
²¹Then I had concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel profaned among the nations where they went.

²²"Therefore, say to the house of Israel, 'This is what the Lord GOD says: It is not for your sake that I will act, house of Israel, but for my holy name, which you profaned among the nations where you went. ²³I will honor the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations—the name you have profaned among them. The nations will know that I am the LORD—this is the declaration of the Lord GOD—when I demonstrate my holiness through you in their sight.

B. The Apostle Paul is reminding the Jewish believers of their sketchy past.

- a. They were given every opportunity by God but defiled the land.
- b. Because they acted disgracefully publicly, the Lord punished them publicly.
 - a. It is like a kid throwing a fit in the grocery store and the parent spanking them in the aisle.
 - b. It embarrasses the kid and the parents.
 - c. But it has to be done.

C. The problem was that the Jewish believers were bragging about how good they were, forgetting how bad they had been.

- a. Both Isaiah 52 and Ezekiel 36 tell of the Jews blaspheming and embarrassing God in front of all the nations.
- b. The world watched as God's people behaved badly and were punished.
- c. And if you listen, you can hear the allegations of the enemy:
 1. And you call yourself God's chosen people...
 2. And you call yourself a man or woman of God...
 3. And you think you are better than us, but you can't keep the Law either.

3. I can't, but God can.

A. Paul will tell the Jews in Romans over and over that they need the grace and mercy that is only found through Jesus.

1. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.
2. There is no favoritism with God.

3. We all stand condemned apart from the grace and mercy of God.

4. And it has ALWAYS been this way!

B. Let me read more of Ezekiel 36 AND notice who does the work of salvation and restoration:

Ezekiel 36:24–32 (CSB)

24 “For I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries, and will bring you into your own land. **25** I will also sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your impurities and all your idols. **26** I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. **27** I will place my Spirit within you and cause you to follow my statutes and carefully observe my ordinances. **28** You will live in the land that I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God. **29** I will save you from all your uncleanness. I will summon the grain and make it plentiful, and I will not bring famine on you. **30** I will also make the fruit of the trees and the produce of the field plentiful, so that you will no longer experience reproach among the nations on account of famine.

31 “You will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves for your iniquities and detestable practices. **32** It is not for your sake that I will act—this is the declaration of the Lord God—let this be known to you. Be ashamed and humiliated because of your ways, house of Israel!

1. It was God who restored Israel.

2. It was for the sake of His name that God acted in the history of His people.

3. It is by His great name and for His glory that we live today.

C. Whether you are Jewish or Gentile, we are saved only by God’s love, grace, and mercy.

1. I can't earn it; I can only receive it as a gift.
2. I can't make it happen because I will only mess it up.
3. What I can't do by my own effort, I can receive through faith in Jesus Christ.

4. Because Jesus is, I will not embarrass Him.

A. The good news is that I don't have to save myself.

1. Jesus died for me, so I could have life.
2. Jesus forgives me, so I can stand righteous before God.
3. Jesus loves me, so I can walk in freedom.

B. Because of what Jesus has done, I will not blaspheme His name before the nations.

1. The Jews were blaspheming God by claiming to be holy while walking in filth.
2. They chided the Gentiles for their sins while applauding, approving, and participating in the same sins.
3. **When our words do not align with our witness, we are worse than hypocrites: we are blasphemers.**

C. Here's more good news: we no longer have to live a life of sin.

1. Romans 6 tells us we have been set free from sin.
2. We do not have to live a life that dishonors, embarrasses, and blasphemes God, but we can live a life that pleases God.
3. We do not have to grieve the Holy Spirit all of the time.
4. **You can live a scandal-less life.**

D. Sidenote: This Wednesday, we are doing another deep dive into sexual sin and its origins.

- a. Part of the reason we are doing this is to talk about the damage that sin does to the Church's witness to the world.

- b. Sometimes we are falsely accused by the world when they say, "and you call yourself a Christian."
- c. But too often, we bring reproach to ourselves and to the Body of Christ because our behavior does not align with creed.
- d. We preach, but fall into the same sin.
- e. We teach, but do not apply it to our lives.
- f. We claim to have the answers, but we fail when questioned.
- d. And it shouldn't be this way.

5. What is my next step:

#1. The first step is to confess and repent of sin.

- a. More than likely, the Holy Spirit has already been showing you areas in your life that needs to change.
- b. Actions or attitudes you were comfortable with are now uncomfortable.
- c. Areas and arenas that you ignored are now spotlighted.
- d. And the good news is, **The Holy Spirit never convicts what cannot be forgiven and changed.**
- e. **Where there is convicting power, there is overcoming power.**

#2. Practice walking in freedom.

- a. It isn't easy learning how to walk in the newness of life.
 - 1. There are moments of brilliance followed by moments of abject failure.
 - 2. Walking in the freedom God has for us seems unnatural after spending our whole lives walking in sin.
- b. That is why we practice walking in freedom.

1. Practice the fundamentals.
 - a. Read your Bible.
 - b. Worship, pray, fast, and serve.
2. Get rid of the obvious.
 - a. If sexual sin is your hangup, then get rid of Netflix and HBO Max, put guards on your electronics, and surround yourself with people who have freedom in that area.
 - b. If you are prone to drunkenness, then throw away the temptation.
 - c. Avoid the triggers that remind you of what you are walking away from.
3. Embrace the process.
 - a. You didn't get to this place overnight, and you might not get out of it overnight.
 - b. Salvation comes in an instant, but for some, freedom comes step-by-step.
 - c. The process may be slow, but you won't speed it up by quitting.

#3. Consider your witness.

- a. When you think about your interactions in public, on social media, and at home, can others see Christ in you?
- b. This is more than likeability.
 1. I'm called to more than having people like me.
 2. I'm called to help people see Jesus.
- c. You and I represent more than our church, we represent Jesus to a world that doesn't know Him.

1. If someone was to observe your life, how much Jesus will they see?
2. Or, would they say, "And you call yourself a Christian?"
3. May we not blaspheme God.

Prayer:

May we never be comfortable in our sin.

May the Holy Spirit empower us to overcome sin in our lives.

May our witness reflect the love and goodness of Jesus.