

Intro:

We began our new section in Romans last week with a broad survey message. There are three sorts of men we are talking about in Romans 1-3, all under the wrath and condemnation of God.

Who are these three men?

1. The Pagan Man
2. The Moral Man
3. The Religious Man

Our attention is turning now, from 2.17-3.8 or so to the Religious Man. What do you think a religious man looks like?

I've given our message this title:

Portrait of a Good Religious Man

What is a portrait? The Wikipedia definition:

A **portrait** is a painting, photograph, sculpture, or other artistic representation of a person, in which the face and its expression is predominant. The intent is to display the likeness, personality, and even the mood of the person. For this reason, in photography a portrait is generally not a snapshot, but a composed image of a person in a still position. A portrait often shows a person looking directly at the painter or photographer, in order to most successfully engage the subject with the viewer.¹

The Wikipedia article goes on to talk about a portrait in Literature:

In **literature** the term *portrait* refers to a written description or analysis of a person or thing. A written portrait often gives deep insight, and offers an analysis that goes far beyond the superficial.²

Our passage is not an in-depth literary analysis of a religious man, but it does provide an outline. What I am trying to do in this sermon is flesh out the portrait a bit for us so that we can see what it is that I mean when we use the term “religious man” in Romans 2-3.

We need to keep two thoughts in mind concerning the Religious Man:

1. By lifestyle, temperament and reputation, the Religious Man is completely respectable.
2. By God, the Religious Man is as much under condemnation and wrath as the Pagan Man, or the godless Moral Man we have been discussing.

¹ Wikipedia, “Portrait”, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portrait> (Accessed 10.24.08).

² *Ibid.*

Read Rm 2.17-24

There is a logic to our passage here. You will note that I told you last week the “Behold” of the KJV should probably be the “But if” of the NAS. Everything we will look at today is contained in the “if” – “if you should be such a man”, well then, (or ‘therefore’) Paul has some questions for you, which you see in v.21.

Our text today provides a frame on which we will hang a portrait, first of the religious man of the first century, as he sees himself to be; then we hope to see what that man may look like today.

I. The picture of a man secure in his religion (17-18)

A. Bearing a distinctive name (17a)

1. In the first century, a marked distinction between Jew and Gentile

a. View of Jewish territory: ‘The Land’ and ‘outside The Land’

“But ‘outside the land’ everything was darkness and death. The very dust of a heathen country was unclean, and it defiled by contact. It was regarded like a grave, or like the putrescence of death. If a spot of heathen dust had touched an offering, it must at once be burnt. More than that, if by mischance any heathen dust had been brought into Palestine, it did not and could not mingle with that of ‘the land,’ but remained to the end what it had been—unclean, defiled, and defiling everything to which it adhered.”³

b. View of Jewish superiority [based especially on religion]

“By profession and practice the Jews stood separate from the Gentile nations; ... because he had a God-given religion ...”⁴

2. The Jewish distinction is not to be understood negatively

“Of course, Jewishness is not a disadvantage, for Yahweh had entered into a special covenant with the Jews (Rm 3.1-3). Indeed, Paul expected the reader to interpret every item in the list positively. There is no hint that any of the privileges in the list are to be understood negatively.”⁵

³ Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ*. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2003). 15.

⁴ Herman A. Hoyt, *The First Christian Theology*, p. 47.

⁵ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, p. 129.

- a. We are used to thinking of Jewishness and Judaism negatively (Jewish prejudices contribute to our negative perceptions)
- b. In this list, Paul is talking about characteristics that are seen as blessings brought about by the prize possession of special revelation – the Old Testament
 - 1) Pagan man – rejects natural revelation
 - 2) Moral man – ignores conscience
 - 3) Religious man – fails to follow special revelation

This last is where we are headed, but first we are painting a portrait of the blessings special revelation gave to the Jew.

B. Depending on a solid foundation (17b)

1. The Law is surely a solid foundation
 - a. Given by God
 - b. Paul is going to say, ‘the Law is good’ (Rm 7.12)
 - c. Intended to make men dependent on God
2. The Jews as a nation rested on the Law as in itself insulating them from the judgement the nations deserved

“In [the Talmud], it is declared that the study of the law is equivalent to the keeping of all the commandments. Upon this the Jew rested, meaning that upon the law he rested, leaned, refreshed himself — a sort of blind, mechanical reliance on the Mosaic law.”⁶

“In Paul’s time some of the leaders of Judaism were making such extravagant statements about the law as to put it virtually in the place of God. Many Jews were trying to keep the law for its own sake, to honor the law rather than its giver.”⁷

3. But consider the faith of the Jews positively: their reliance on the Law meant a right relationship to God [in the Jewish mind] — this is a great privilege in the mind of a religious man

⁶ Herman A. Hoyt, *The First Christian Theology*, p. 48.

⁷ Everett F. Harrison, “Romans” in *Expositor’s*, vol. 10, p. 33.

Because of these privileges, they...

C. Make their boast in God (17c)

1. In distinction with the nations, the God of the Jews is the true God
 - a. No need to catalog the grotesque and debauched gods and goddesses of the pagans ...
 - b. YHWH stands out in sharp distinction from all the gods of the heathens
2. Can it be said that glorying in the true God is a negative thing? In the mind of a religious man, this is the right thing to do.

“The problem is not with boasting per se, whether in God or in the law. In this context boasting is not censured; the Jews are criticized for failing to observe the law, and thus for bringing dishonor (v. 24) upon the God in whom they boast.”⁸

- a. For the religious man, to boast in the true God, in knowing him and being known is right
- b. But the question is, as we shall see, is the boast itself *true*? Does the religious man truly know the true God?

D. Knowing the Will (18a)

1. You will notice that we have *his* in italics in v. 18
 - a. Lit.: you know the will
 - b. “The will” = The will of YHWH

“In the original it is simply ‘the will’, indicating that such when used absolutely is self-explanatory as designating the will of God.”⁹

2. The fact is, the religious man has great knowledge of God’s will
 - a. Consider the bare outline of the Ten Commandments
 - b. These commandments mark out God’s will explicitly and clearly, distinguishing those taught by the law from those ignorant of the law

⁸ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, p. 130.

⁹ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 82.

- 1) No idolatry
- 2) No adultery
- 3) Honor to parents
- 4) No coveting

Is not the religious man's mind far better informed on subjects such as these than the heathen?

Consider our society at large, how many men have no knowledge of these things?

- Consider, for example, the widespread adultery in our society.
- Is not the religious man much better educated concerning God's will in this area?

Knowing the will of God is a great blessing, one the Jews held proudly.

E. Proving things that differ, *i.e.*, discerning excellence [or not]

1. The phrase is literally 'proving things that differ'
 - a. Able to make distinctions between things
 - b. Able to discern the good from the bad
 - c. Or, as the translations put it:
 - 1) "Approvest the things that are more excellent" KJV
 - 2) "Approve the things that are essential" NAS
2. The advantage comes from spiritual education in the law
 - a. Hearing the Scriptures read
 - b. Thinking on them; gaining insight
 - c. Indeed, all these five blessings come from one source: "being instructed out of the law"

"The instruction ultimately refers to the public instruction received by the hearing of the law and from teaching on the part of parents, priests and Levites (*cf.* Lev 10.11; Dt 24.8, 33.10; Neh 8.8)."¹⁰

¹⁰ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 82.

The religious man is distinguished from the nations by these five blessings, brought about by the revelation of God:

- A distinguishing name
- A dependable revelation
- A connection with the true God
- A knowledge of God's will
- An insight into superior lifestyles

The possession of these blessings persuade their possessor about something else of himself:

II. The self-confidence of a man secure in his religion (19-20)

- A. He is persuaded, confident of his own place in the world
1. Indeed, God intended for the Jews to be an example to the nations
 2. Their conception was not missionary, but 'guru-like': *i.e.*, they thought of themselves as ones to be consulted, not as evangelists
 3. Their persuasion is the result of the blessings listed in the previous verses
- B. Consider the metaphors used to describe this persuasion
1. A guide to the blind
 2. A light to those in darkness
 3. An instructor of the foolish
 4. A teacher of babes
- C. His persuasion comes from having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth
1. Knowledge and truth are abstracts: the Law is the very 'morphing' of knowledge and truth into something tangible

The religious man is one who sees himself secure in his religion, one who is rightly related to God, and one who possesses the right view of the world and its affairs.

2. As far as it goes, we have to say that this was *true* of the Jews

III. The perpetual self-portrait of any man secure in his religion

A. What would a religious man look like today?

1. He has a name: Christian [marks him out from the lost world]
2. He has a revelation: the Bible
3. He has a connection with the true God [we can say this of anyone bearing the name 'Christian' today]
 - a. Even some Christian cults claim this name
 - 1) Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses
 - 2) They have the Bible
 - 3) They claim a connection with the true God
 - b. Roman Catholics
 - c. Liberal Protestantism – United, Anglican, some Lutherans, Methodists, etc.
 - d. Evangelical Protestantism – Nazarene, Pentecostal Assemblies, Baptists, you name it...
 - e. And even independent Baptists like us

It is not that all of these people have a *real* connection with the true God — what we are saying in our portrait is this: they imagine they have a connection with the true God because of what they see in God's book, the Bible.

I read the Bible, ergo, I am connected with the true God.

Actually, one doesn't even have to read... just have... or even just know about...

4. He knows the Will (from hearing it read out of the Bible)
 5. He has insight into life (from hearing it read out of the Bible)
- B. The religious man today is as confident in his position as the Jew of the first century

1. But is the religious man today connected truly to the true God?

Are you connected truly to the true God?

2. This Religious confidence is based solely on hearing and having the truth

- a. Look again at v. 18: ‘being instructed out of the law’
- b. Look again at v. 20: ‘having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth’ NAS

Just because you hear (are instructed), is that enough for a right relationship with God?

Just because you have (carry a Bible), is that enough for a right relationship with God?

Conclusion:

What more is needed? Is there something that must be done?

The Bible is going to teach us that there is nothing that can be done, we must see our need, repent of our sins, and rely on Christ and Christ alone for our salvation.

A man who does that won't be religious, hearing and having a book, he will be a real Christian, living for a real man, Jesus Christ.

Is your life pictured as religious?

Or is your life pictured as Christian, *i.e.*, a ‘little Christ’, a ‘Christ-one’?