

Romans: False Righteousness

[Romans 2:17–3:8](#)

As Paul addresses the Jews of the early Roman church, he exposes their false righteousness. They identify more with the law and their holy history as God's chosen people than with the person and work of Jesus. This misplaced hope and identity obscures the gospel, limits their unity with other believers, inhibits their ministry, and perpetuates hypocrisy. We must examine our hearts and be sure our identity is solely in the saving work of Christ rather than any other source of righteousness.

Application

1. Like the Jews, many of us are tempted to identify more with our "holy history" than our true need for salvation from our sin. What other sources of righteousness do you tend to find value in (tribal, political, family, job, theological, financial, legalistic, mercy) How does that dependence on false righteousness manifest itself as hypocrisy in your life?
2. We all have the common experience of the downward spiral—rejecting God and allowing our sin to lead us into darkness and confusion. What does it look like for you to embrace that story? How can you leverage your story of brokenness and redemption through Christ to serve and lead others?
3. Are you fully acquainted with your brokenness and need for Christ? If your sin story is "not that bad," what does that reveal about your self-awareness? What steps do you need to take in order to understand the gospel more fully?

Key Points

- The Jews of the early Roman church identify with the law and their special relationship with God—their holy history as God's people. This false righteousness limits their understanding of the gospel and their ability to relate to other believers.
- Similarly, many of us fail to recognize our own downward spiral of brokenness. This lack of self-awareness cuts us off from experiencing the weight and power of what Jesus has done for us.
- Those who claim to be Christians but cannot relate to the deep brokenness of other people are both self-deceived and a threat to the unity of the church.

- If we count on anything other than the saving grace of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection to connect us to God, then we obscure the gospel. Indeed, relying on false righteousness will always result in hypocrisy.
- The Jews over-identified with the outward sign of circumcision rather than loyalty to God to make them holy. In the same way, we tend to identify with our Christian families, associations with church, or other outward signs to grant us proximity to God.
- It is impossible to lead with vulnerability while clinging to an image. We should be known as people who are honest about our sin and who live in a process of perpetual repentance.

Other Scripture References

[Luke 5:31-32](#)