

Spiritual Insiders and Outsiders

Romans was written to a predominantly Gentile church. These Gentiles (and any Jews in their midst) needed to be convinced that being Jewish didn't make a person a spiritual insider with God and being Gentile didn't make a person a spiritual outsider. They needed to understand that everybody has the same access to God through faith in Jesus. This is true for us as well. We may look around and think other people have all sorts of spiritual advantages over us and that we have certain disadvantages that make it difficult for us to experience a close, growing relationship with God. If we struggle with this, may we hear what Paul has to say in this passage and be convinced that in Jesus there truly are no spiritual outsiders.

Opening Question: Can you think of a time when you felt like an outsider in some area of life? If so, what was that like?

Read Romans 2:17-29

1. If you were a Gentile in the church at Rome, what advantages might you have thought the Jews had over you in terms of being able to develop a close relationship with God (vv. 17-20)?
2. What is Paul's charge against the Jews (i.e. how did they fail to live out their calling in the old covenant)?

Steve said:

Paul's argument in [verses 17-24] is that those who were considered spiritual insiders [i.e. the Jews] hadn't fulfilled their calling. Yes, they had spiritual advantages, but that didn't mean they were automatically pleasing to God. In a similar way, you might need to stop viewing others as spiritual insiders - those who seemingly have all sorts of advantages because of spiritual heritage or circumstances. The point here isn't to tear others down so that you feel good about yourself. The point is to align your thinking with spiritual reality. We need to quit looking across the room and thinking, "Their spiritual advantages make them spiritual insiders." We need to quit mentally giving ourselves an "out" by telling ourselves that we're outsiders who never really had a chance to get close to God. That line of thinking squelches our faith and keeps us stuck in unbelief.

3. Have you ever felt like a spiritual outsider (i.e. that others had all the spiritual advantages)?

4. What new spiritual categories does Paul introduce in verses 25-29 that turns the whole insider/outside discussion upside down?
5. Read Jeremiah 31:33-34 and Ezekiel 36:26-27 (verses that speak of the New Covenant). How do these passages relate to Romans 2:29?
6. How does the New Covenant suggest that we all can get close to God regardless of our background and our advantages/disadvantages?

Steve said:

If you are a believer in Jesus, you are now a spiritual insider - not in some elitist sense, but in the sense that you really can't be any closer to God. You can't get any closer to the heart of God than being "in Christ" and having "Christ in you" through the Holy Spirit. Let that sink in for a minute. . . Your progress in holiness isn't ultimately a function of your personality or your past or your family of origin; those things certainly affect your life, but they aren't your identity and they don't define you spiritually. Your identity and your destiny are defined by the death and resurrection of Jesus. Believing this changes the way you think about your relationship with God and your spiritual growth; believing this can give you hope . . . If you have trusted in Jesus, you are in Christ and Christ is in you. You can be sure that God has given you everything you need to thrive in your relationship with Him.

7. How would it affect you if you genuinely believed that God has given you everything you need to thrive in your relationship with Him (especially if you've tended to see yourself as a spiritual outsider)?