

Romans 2:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God,

Analysis

Behold, thou art called a Jew—Ἴδε σὺ Ἰουδαῖος ἐπονομάζῃ (ide sy Ioudaios eponomazē). Ἐπονομάζω (eponomazō, "are named/called") emphasizes identity claim—bearing the honored title "Jew" (Judean, praised one, from Judah). Paul now shifts from general argument (1:18-2:16) to direct address, confronting Jewish presumption head-on. The vocative Ἴδε (ide, "behold/look") arrests attention. **And retest in the law**—ἐπαναπαύῃ νόμῳ (epanapaēē nomō), "repose/rely on the law." False security, treating Torah possession as guarantee rather than responsibility.

And makest thy boast of God—καυχᾶσαι ἐν θεῷ (kauchasai en theō, "boast in God"). Legitimate boasting (Jeremiah 9:23-24, 1 Corinthians 1:31), corrupted into ethnic pride. Jews rightly celebrated knowing the true God versus Gentile idolatry, but twisted privilege into presumption. Paul himself once boasted in Jewish pedigree (Philippians 3:4-6) until Christ shattered it, counting it as σκύβαλα (skybala, "rubbish/dung").

Verses 17-20 catalog Jewish privileges—name, law, relationship with God, knowledge, confident leadership—then verses 21-24 devastate with hypocrisy accusations. The structure mirrors Jesus's Matthew 23 woes against scribes and Pharisees. Paul's rhetoric shifts from third-person argument to second-person indictment, personalizing the confrontation. This isn't anti-Jewish polemic but internal critique from a devout Jew addressing fellow Jews (Paul's self-description: Romans 11:1, Philippians 3:5).

Historical Context

First-century Jews wore the title "Jew" with immense pride, distinguishing themselves from Gentile ethnē (nations). Post-exilic Judaism developed strong ethnic identity centered on Torah, temple, and territorial claims. The Maccabean revolt (167-160 BC) intensified this, celebrating Jewish resistance to Hellenization. By Paul's era, many Jews viewed their covenant status as guaranteeing divine favor, treating God as tribal deity rather than universal Creator who judges impartially.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. What religious identity or title do I 'rest in'—Christian, church member, baptized—treating it as guarantee rather than calling?
2. How do I 'boast in God'—celebrating privilege in knowing Him, or presuming on relationship without transformation?
3. In what ways might I be trusting my spiritual heritage (Christian family, biblical knowledge) instead of personal faith in Christ?

Interlinear Text

Ἴδε	σὺ	Ἰουδαῖος	ἐπονομάζῃ	καὶ	ἐπαναπαύῃ	τῷ	νόμῳ
G1492	thou	a Jew	art called	and	restest	G3588	in the law
	G4771	G2453	G2028	G2532	G1879		G3551
καὶ	καυχᾶσαι	ἐν	θεῷ				
and	makest thy boast	of	God				
G2532	G2744	G1722	G2316				

Additional Cross-References

Romans 2:23 (Word): Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?

Micah 3:11 (Parallel theme): The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money: yet will they lean upon the LORD, and say, Is not the LORD among us? none evil can come upon us.

Revelation 2:9 (Parallel theme): I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.

Matthew 3:9 (References God): And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

John 5:45 (Parallel theme): Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust.