

Romans 2 - Religion, Morality and Faith

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We've been going through the Book of Romans. We got through chapter 1, I think, in 3 different installments. But now we come to chapter 2. Remember that we told you that the apostle Paul has never been to Rome, and he knew that there was a group of believers who had come to Christ there in the capital city of the Roman Empire.

But he also knew that they had very little in the way of instruction. And so Paul wrote this letter. He was in Corinth when he wrote it. But he wrote this letter to the church at Rome in order that they might know what they believed and how they were to live. And those were the two main things that Paul is going to say to the church in Rome. Here's what salvation is all about, and here's how you are to live your Christian life and so forth.

Now, in chapter 1, we saw, you'll remember, a couple of verses that we pulled out as distillation—or what's another word I can think of? It's an encapsulation maybe—is a better word of the Book of Romans.

Let me put him up on the screen for you just so you can be reminded of them from Romans chapter 1, verses 16 and 17. Paul wrote:

Romans 1:16-17 (ESV)

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek (meaning Gentile or non-Jew). For in it (the gospel) the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'"

Again, this is a microcosm of the Book of Romans. What we're going to be doing for the next several months, I imagine, however long it takes us to get through Romans, is we're going to be reiterating and reestablishing the truths that we see right here in these two verses, 16 and 17.

If those aren't underlined in your study of the Book of Romans, they should be, because we'll be referring back to them as the bedrock of what we're talking about. So after his usual opening and greeting that Paul makes in his letters and so forth, he began to argue, and we're in the middle of that argument. But he began to argue for the fact that all mankind is under the wrath of God.

Now, stop there for just a moment. Why does the apostle Paul feel it necessary to convince you and I that we're all under God's wrath? I mean, why even bring it up? Isn't that a party killer, you know, that we start just talking about, hey, by the way, did you know you're under God's wrath? I mean, just saying, why is that necessary for him to go over?

Well, here's the reason why: because Jesus came to die for the sins of the world. But until you recognize your need of a savior, you're not going to have any use for Him or the message of the gospel, for that matter. You see, the Bible does not teach, although it has been taught, not from the Bible, but the Bible does not teach that because Jesus died on the cross, all people are saved. It doesn't teach that. That's called universalism and universalism is not a biblical doctrine.

Again, universalism is the idea that Jesus died; it doesn't matter what you believe, what you do, how you live, you're going to heaven, so don't worry about it. What a convenient doctrine that is! It doesn't matter what I do, how I live, what I believe, what I don't believe, I'm going to heaven—woohoo, let's pop the cork and start the party!

Jesus died for the sins of the world so that those who believe—the Bible says that we must receive that free gift—that begins by recognizing our sinful condition. We have to recognize it. We have to confess it. And then we have to believe that Jesus died for our sins on the cross. The requirement on our part is faith. But again, until a person recognizes and confesses their sin, forgiveness is a gift that remains unopened and unused.

All right, so it's very possible for you today, right now, right here—it's very possible that Jesus died for you to wipe out all of your sins, but you've never opened up that present. It's very possible, depending on your response to Him.

Paul is making the point here that the motivating point to get us to open that present, and that motivation is we're all together under the wrath of God. And in order to do that, you'll remember I told you in one of our very first studies that he divided all of mankind into basically three groups of people, and we dealt with the first group last time.

Remember, the first group is those who are godless. And there are people who Paul accused of purposely suppressing the truth of His existence. And we dealt with all of that in our last study in Romans. If you missed that one, get onto our

website and check that one out. What we're going to deal with here in chapter 2 are the two other groups that Paul uses to outline the rest of mankind who are under the wrath of God, and those two final groups are the educated moralists and the religionists.

You've got the godless, the educated moralists, and the religionists. By the way, let me just say something on a personal note. I've been all three. And I don't say that to be funny. I say it because it's true. I've been all three. I have been godless. I have been an educated moralist. And I have been a religionist. And they are all together under God's wrath. And we're going to see that.

Now let's begin with the educated moralist, verse 1: *"Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things."* (ESV)

Stop there. The educated moralist is the refined, in our culture, the educated human beings who live among us who gladly accept the idea of right and wrong. Educated moralists believe very strongly in the idea that there are right ways to live and there are wrong ways to live. And the educated moralist is mostly characterized by looking at the godless in our culture and saying, those people deserve every bit of judgment they're going to get. That's essentially their attitude.

And the reason they say that is because they have simply found more socially acceptable ways of doing the same thing. And maybe you can't smell it on their breath or see it in the way they walk, but it is there just the same. And Paul says to those people, you who point the finger at others, do you really think that you yourselves are going to get off scot-free? Do you really think that you yourself are not going to stand under the judgment of God?

Kind of interesting, isn't it? There's an interesting dynamic that takes place when we give ourselves the freedom to criticize other people, and it can be quite intoxicating, actually. And it actually—how do I say this? It gives us a feeling of moral superiority. That's what it is.

By always looking down our nose at other people and calling them, if you will, on the carpet for all the things that they do, and always highlighting the fact that, this is what you do, it sets me apart as someone who isn't doing those things, supposedly. I remember back when I was in Bible college, there was a group of guys that I didn't really hang with them, but I chatted with them in class before and after class, and they were really into discernment ministries.

Do you guys know what discernment ministries are? They're ministries that crop up, and there are still some around today, but they seem to be bigger back

then. And there are ministries that are set, especially as watchdog ministries, over other ministries. In other words, what they do is they're devoted to the task of keeping their eyes on other people and other groups and churches and ministries to make sure they're toeing the line. That's their job. It's their job to—my calling before God—keep you in line. And it's called—they're called discernment ministries.

And they put out blogs, and they get websites, and they've got radio talk shows sometimes, and they've got all these ways of communicating that, hey, you want to know what's wrong in the body of Christ? We'll tell you, you stick with us, and we'll show you. And that sort of thing, what you ought to be watching out for, all of the things that are dangerous, and so forth.

Even though I wasn't all that mature back when I was going to Bible college—mature in the Lord—even I could recognize that there's something dangerous here, that really strokes a guy's flesh. About being in a discernment ministry or being part of a discernment ministry that is going around checking to see if other people are biblical.

Because it doesn't—it doesn't that infer that you have the ability to see other people's errors because you are error-free? I mean, if you yourself are riddled with errors, then what in the world are you doing pointing somebody else's errors out? So you must be without error, right? And it's just that inference.

They know they don't ever come out and say that. They don't come and say, and because we have absolutely no issues, we're going to now highlight the issues of others. They don't say that. But the inference is there just the same, you see, and that's the problem with the moralist.

They're always looking at other people's mistakes, and what it tends to do is it tends to blind them to their own. Right? They don't ever get around to talking about their own issues because they're too busy pointing out other people's issues. That is the educated moralist. I've been that person. God saved me from doing that again.

Because, you remember what Jesus said, don't you, about helping your brother take the splinter out of his eye? You remember that story? In fact, I always, when I think about this, I always come back to that story in the Gospel of John where the woman is caught in the act of adultery and dragged out into the streets and literally thrown at the feet of Jesus while the men who brought her there began to pick up stones to kill her and so forth. And they asked Jesus what he thought they should do in sort of a testing sort of a way.

You guys know the story. Jesus basically said, you want to kill this woman? Okay, kill her. Fine. Throw stones at her until she's dead. But here's the one

rule. The very first stone that is thrown at this woman must come from the hand of whomever among you is without sin.

And you guys know how the story goes. They slowly started putting their rocks down and went home, which is an interesting sort of a statement about the moralist (John 8:1-11). I think he innately knows that he's a fake. And he knows he doesn't have a leg to stand on, but the problem is he rarely gives it any thought because he's spending so much time pointing out the sins of others.

I think we need to be so careful when we are put out by someone's sin. The last few weeks have been challenging in the body of Christ as it relates to seeing sin because, after the Supreme Court decision, a lot of believers are just really challenged with the whole idea of how we're to respond, and what is our heart toward this whole situation? And what does the Bible really have to say? And just feeling all kinds of emotions running through our hearts about this sort of a situation.

But whenever that happens, you guys, we got to be careful. We have to be careful because it's not necessarily an unbiblical or wrong thing to point out sin. But we always have to do it in a spirit of humility, and we have to do it recognizing that we ourselves have every capacity of walking in that same sin or something just as heinous. Oh, we're so good at looking at other people sometimes and saying, oh, they're sin, and completely ignoring what's going on in our own heart. Listen, the educated moralist can be inside of all of us at any given time.

So Paul goes on to say in verse 2—look with me there in your Bible: *"We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things."* We know His judgment is right. But he says, ³*"Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God?"*

He says, do you really think God's going to judge them and overlook you? Again, he's talking to the educated moralist here who likes to look down their nose at other people. Do you think you're not going to be in on this?

And then he says in verse 4, *"Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?"*

Paul is warning the moralist: listen, hey, partner, don't misinterpret God's inaction or lack of activity related to judging as if that is somehow a sign that you're okay. You know, it's possible to do that. God hasn't nuked me yet. I guess I'm okay. The educated moralist might come to that conclusion, and Paul is saying right here, listen, don't toy with God's patience and forbearance and

long-suffering. The reason that He is delaying judgment upon this earth is because He wants more people to come to faith right in Jesus Christ.

What does the Bible say? God is not willing that any should be lost, but that all should come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9) And so we're not to interpret his slowness in bringing that judgment as a sign that somehow God has checked out or that we're doing okay. We simply understand that it is God's kindness being expressed to people that they are given more time to repent.

Verse 5: *"But because of your hard and impenitent (or unrepentant) heart (and that's the character of this individual), you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed."*

Paul is warning the moralist that instead of focusing on the sins of others, they need to recognize that God is giving them time to repent. Otherwise, God's wrath is coming.

And then he goes on to say that when God's wrath does come—when the judge does sit on his throne and judge the world—look what he says in verse 6: *"He will render to each one according to his works:"*

Oh sure, wish the apostle Paul wouldn't have said that. It makes it sound like we're saved by our works, doesn't it? If you keep reading, it even sounds more so.

Look what he says: *"⁷ to those who by patience in well-doing (or good works) seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; ⁸ but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. ⁹ There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, ¹⁰ but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. ¹¹ For God shows no partiality."* Stop there.

Here's the question. Is the apostle Paul saying here that salvation is something we earn by our good works? No, obviously he's not. He's not saying that. But you'll notice here he's talking about works. He's stressing the importance of works. Why is he doing that? Sometimes we Christians get a little bit uncomfortable when the apostle Paul talks a little too much about works.

We want to say to him, you could have toned that one down just a tad, because people are going to get a hold of this thing, and they're going to run off half-cocked, and they're going to come up with all kinds of stupid doctrines that say you got to be a good person in order to get to heaven. Because you know what? We naturally believe that anyway, right? There's a great many people who believe that in order to go to heaven, you got to be a good person.

Paul, why would you say this? It's just going to confuse people because we know that we're not saved by works. We know we're saved by grace through faith. And this not of ourselves; it is the gift of God. (Ephesians 2:8-9) Right? We know that it's the gift of God, and gifts can't be earned. They're just given freely, right? We know those things. So Paul, why did you say this? He said it because works are the proof of what our lives are really all about.

And this is something we don't hear often enough in Christian churches because we get nervous about saying it. You see, when a person chooses to reject Jesus—when they say, you know what? I reject God. I reject what Jesus did for me on the cross. I reject that there even is a God—there will be a natural outgrowth of their lives. It will just happen. Like the flow of water, it will just happen. It will come from that conclusion, that choice.

But by the same token, when a person chooses to receive Christ, and they're truly born again of the Spirit of God, there will likewise be a natural outgrowth that Paul describes there in verse 7—that thing about patience in well-doing and living a life seeking to glorify and honor God and that sort of thing.

In other words, when you're a child of God, your life is going to show it. When you have rejected God and said, I don't want him in my life, your life is going to show it. It's not rocket science, right? It's pretty simple, actually. Even a dope head like me can understand it. There's a natural outflow of our choices. And that's what Paul is saying in these passages. He's not saying you're saved by your good works. He's saying you'll be recognized by your good works.

And after that recognition, you will receive eternal life. If you need, there are other passages that talk about this. The book of James is a great book where the earthly brother of our Lord wrote about this. And he said, listen, do you think that faith without any corresponding proof is real faith? He says, I don't think so. I think it's dead faith. If your faith is alive, there will be a corresponding proof of that faith, right? (James 2:14-26) It just stands to reason.

If somebody says, I have faith, I have faith, I have faith, and there's nothing corresponding in the way of godliness in their lives, you look at them a little bit and you go, really? Are you sure about that? Because that's just like saying, I'm an apple tree. I'm an apple tree. I'm an apple tree, but there aren't any apples on the branches. Paul is talking about a natural sort of a thing. Let me show you another passage from Ephesians chapter 2, where he writes and says,

Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them

For we are his workmanship (and look what we've been created to do, we've been) created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Guys, as Christians, before you even came to Christ, you were prepared to do good works that were prepared for you to walk them out. And you know what? Those good works are a proof of who you are. The kind of person you are and the choices that you've made in your life—they don't save you, but they are something that show forth when you're saved. Does that make sense? A defining sign, if you will.

Alright, let's review. Paul has confronted the godless, which I have been, and so they are under the wrath of God. He has now confronted the educated moralist, which I have been. And the last group of people that he's going to speak to here is the religious. And he has chiefly in mind the religious Jews because that was what he knew. But these verses and this understanding of what it means to be religious could apply to anyone, not just Jewish religious people, but really anybody.

And here's what he says. Look at verse 12 in your Bible: *"For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law."* ¹³ *For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified* ¹⁴ *For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves (again, it's that defining idea) even though they do not have the law.* ¹⁵ *They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them* ¹⁶ *on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus."* Stop there.

Religious people—here's what Paul is addressing now. He's addressing what religious people tend to comfort themselves with. And they tend to comfort themselves with the fact that they go to church, and they know what the Word of God says. The Jews were like that. They knew the Word; they had received the law, and they went to synagogue, and they did their sacrificial stuff, and they thought, we're good. We're good to go here.

And this whole idea has permeated the Christian church as well. People think, because I come to church, and I got a Bible on my lap, and I know what the Bible says—I've read through the Bible—I'm good.

But Paul is going to basically dismantle what they've placed their confidence in related to their religiosity. And he's going to do it by making two points. First, he's going to say that those who know the law will still be subject to judgment by that very law. In other words—or what you could say for Christians—is that

those who know the Word, just because they know the Word, doesn't mean they're not going to stand in judgment of the Word.

It's not knowing the Word that is important, right? It's obeying the Word. What is the first obedience that we, as Christians, should be showing to the Lord? It's putting our faith in Jesus Christ and His finished work on the cross. Remember what the Jews came and said to Jesus?

They said, what work must we do to do the works of God? Jesus said, the works of God are this: to believe on His Son, the one He has sent. (John 6:28-29) That's the first and primary work of God. You want to do the works of God? Put your faith in Him.

And, because technically that's not even a work—it's faith, right? But religious people, they put their faith in the fact that they know what the Word of God says, and they go to church. They'll even tell you, hey, listen, I go to church. I've been going to church for 45 years. What are you doing telling me about this God stuff? I've read the Bible 4 times from cover to cover. I know what the Bible says. That's the religionist who's comforted by their knowledge of those sorts of things.

Paul goes in, and he says, listen, knowing it isn't enough. The Jews thought because they knew the law that somehow they were good with God. He says, listen, just because you know the law doesn't mean you aren't going to be judged by that law.

He says, don't you know that the only person who is going to get a free pass is the one who keeps the law? But he's going to say later on that you can't keep the law. Nobody's ever done that perfectly, but if it were possible, that's what it would take.

There are some people who have read these verses and come to the conclusion that people actually could keep the law perfectly. They'll say, hey, listen, look at these verses right here. It says, the Apostle Paul said it's not the one who hears, it's the one who keeps the law who will be justified in God's sight.

But you know what? You've got to keep reading. Because in the next chapter, he says, but nobody's going to be justified in His sight by keeping the law. You've got to follow his thought process. Let me show you. We'll skip ahead to chapter 3. Okay. And put it up on the screen here for you, because this is where Paul outlines it, 3:20.

Romans 3:20 (ESV)

For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

For by works of the law no human being (that pretty much sums it all up, right?) will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin."

The law was given to make us aware we can't keep the law, right? That's why the law was given. That's what Paul's saying here. Through the law, we become knowledgeable about sin. We understand what sin is through the law, but we can't keep it and be justified. No one, by works of the law, is going to be justified in God's sight by keeping the law. Oh man, this just smacks the religionist right upside the head.

This just destroys his world because his confidence was in the idea that, I'm okay, you know, because of this. The religionist desperately wants to believe that by his religious devotion, he will be acceptable to God. And he's convinced himself, I study hard, I go to church, I read my Bible, and I do these other things that the Bible tells us to do. And you're telling me that's not enough? Yeah, that's exactly what Paul's saying. That's not enough. You are still under the wrath of God because you're trusting in the wrong thing.

Paul goes on—look at verse 17. He says, *"...if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law..."* and again, the Jewish religionists were the ones he had chiefly in mind. In other words, if you're relying on your ability to keep the law and you boast in God and you know his will and you approve what is excellent because you are instructed in the law, see.

And look at this, verse 19: *"And if you are absolutely sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind..."* By the way, that's how religious people view the rest of the world. Those poor people, they're just so blind.

But that's that religious sort of sense of superiority; If these other people only knew what I know, then they'd be okay. So I am going to dedicate my life, God, to telling these people and teaching them about the Bible and what's true, as if knowing those things is enough to save you.

He says, if you believe that you are, I'm reading on, end of verse 19, *"...a light to those who are in darkness"*—that's a little condescending too. He says, ²⁰*(If you believe that you're) an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of (mere) children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth (which they did) ²¹ you then (who) teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal?"* Stop there for just a moment.

This is the reason why being a religious person can't save you. It is so easy to tell others what is right and wrong. The problem is religion doesn't give you a way of actually changing your heart. You can know, here, what's right and wrong, and you can preach it to others, but religion has no mechanism to change who you are on the inside, right?

All it does is give you head knowledge and a sense of superiority. If you just knew what I knew, so sit down, let me teach you. Right now you're blind and foolish, and you're like a child, so sit down. I want to tell you these things. Maybe you'll someday be as smart as me, right? And then you can be acceptable to God too. It's easy to sit and tell people what to do. This is right and this is wrong, but religion cannot change who you are here in the heart. It does nothing.

Listen, people. Teaching and preaching for over 30 years—can I just say something? Preaching and teaching is the easy part. Living it is the hard part. And don't for a moment believe that just because I'm up here teaching it and preaching it that it's easy for me. Because it's probably harder. I find living the Christian life a major challenge and something that is virtually impossible without the power of the Holy Spirit. But I keep messing up trying to get His power in my life because I keep trying to do it in my own strength. That's my life. Anyway, true confession time.

Listen, it's easy to preach, but that doesn't mean I have victory over that thing. I can sit up here, and I can rail against various sins—the sin of covetousness, or the sin of lust, or the sin of pride, or the sin of jealousy, or whatever. I can sit here and go, yeah! Yeah! But it doesn't mean at all just because I'm saying it that I have victory over those things.

And that's what Paul is saying here. You who preach to others, do you preach to yourself? Or are you trying to just simply convey this religious superiority that makes it look to other people that you got this thing dialed in because you're the one telling us about it?

Verse 22: *"You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery?"* In other words, do you have victory over these areas of lust in your heart? You talk about it, but do you have victory over it? *"You who abhor idols, do you actually rob temples?"* ²³ *You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking that very law.* ²⁴ *For as it is written, 'The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.'"* You can tell God's not terribly impressed with religionists.

And so Paul's going to end this chapter by talking about the Jewish rite of circumcision. And he's going to talk about circumcision. But please understand, religionists throughout the ages have all kinds of things that they put their trust in, just like the Jews put their trust in circumcision.

Do you understand that the Jews did that? They were given the rite of circumcision through Abraham, and then it was passed on to the Jews, to the Jewish family. But the people began to actually trust in this surgical procedure

that was done to a male Jewish child on the eighth day of his life as if that was what dialed him in to God's will, purpose, and blessing, right?

So think about the things that Christian religious people or other religious people depend on. And put that into this idea of circumcision—you'll see what Paul's saying.

Verse 25, and we'll end with this thought here. He says, "*For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision.*" Right?

In other words, you may have gone through these rite, but if you live your life like nothing has changed, what good has it done you? It's like you were never circumcised.

Religionists have a hard time understanding the meaning behind things. And that's exactly what the Jews did. You see, for the Jews—remember this. You guys know what circumcision is. I trust I don't have to get graphic with you.

Circumcision is essentially a cutting away of the flesh. And that's what they did surgically to all their little boys on the eighth day. But they forgot to meditate and reflect upon the greater meaning of circumcision, which was cutting away the flesh of their hearts.

In other words, through confession and repentance, bringing their sinful nature before God and saying, forgive me, God, this is flesh and it stinks. And it needs to be cut away.

The Jews never connected that sort of an idea. They just went through the outward physical surgical process and said, see, we're good. Been circumcised. Good. Right. Yep. We're good. How did you live? That's okay. You've been circumcised.

What do we do today? Hey, you know how many people I've talked to who are trusting in things like water baptism. Are you a Christian? Yeah. How do you know? I was dunked. Really? But you don't seem to be living a life that's consistent with—well, I mean, I got my child. I'm not perfect, but I got dunked.

Or how about this: I took communion for the first time when I was six years old. Good to go. Well, what's communion mean? Well, I don't really know, but it's just one of those things we're supposed to do. And I did it, and I'm good. Get out of my face. See, that's the religionist. They do things. They're involved in rites and ceremonies and regulations and things. They don't really understand them.

In fact, if you press them too hard, they'll probably get mad at you because they don't really know why they do what they do. They did it because they were told to do it, but they're trusting in it. That is an empty religion. Ceremonialism. Yeah, there's some really significant things behind it. They don't know what they are. Why do you do that? I don't know. Told to. Oh, okay. But I did it. So I'm good to go.

So that's why Paul says, look at verse 26. *"So if a man who is uncircumcised (or has never been baptized in water, never taken communion) keeps the precepts of the law (or walks with God in a very genuine and sincere fashion), will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?"*

He's saying if somebody who never received all those other religious rites is actually walking with God in a true act of sincerity in the same way that you're trusting in your rites or observances, is not that person actually doing better than you? That's what Paul is trying to say.

He's saying, isn't their life a closer picture of godliness than yours? And you're the one who went through all these ceremonies and rites and things. You've been baptized. You've taken communion. You've done this. You've got your Bible on your lap.

You know the Word of God and all those other things. And yet this person is living a life that is more genuinely connected with what it means to be a believer in Jesus. And you're going off on your own, doing your own thing, and living a life of rebellion and sin. And yet you're trusting in all these things that you did at one time. Paul says it's useless.

Verse 27: *"For he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law (or walks with God) will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law."*

Now, he's saying this for the sake of the argument. Actually, whether you're circumcised or not, nobody can perfectly keep the law. We know that. And again, he'll make that point later on again here in Romans.

But here's what he's saying, verse 28 and following: *"For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. ²⁹ But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God."*

Boy, you could apply those same truths for Christians. You could say, Christianity is not about the home you were raised in or the parents that you had who taught you about Jesus. We had all these wonderful families standing up

here today who promised in your presence to talk about Jesus to their kids and to raise them in a Christian home.

But you know what? Every single one of those kids is going to have to decide for themselves one day. Just because they were raised in a Christian home doesn't get them in. They're going to have to personally come to the place of decision, right?

One day—nobody is ever going to be able to say, hey, I was raised in a Christian home. Praise God. My mom and dad were sincere believers in the Lord and they taught me the things of God and so forth. Thank you, Jesus. That's not enough. Just like Paul says, circumcision is not merely physical and outward. Neither is your Christian faith merely physical and outward.

I don't care if you've been baptized in water. I don't care if you've taken communion. Have you put your faith in Jesus Christ? As Paul says here, it's a matter of the heart. Faith in God is a matter of the heart. It's not external; it's internal, you see? And it must be internal.

How do you know you're a Christian? I was raised in a Christian home. No, wrong answer. How do you know you're a Christian? Because Jesus died for me and I put my faith in him for my sins. Right answer. It's not outward. How do you know you're a Christian? I was baptized in water. Wrong answer. I'm glad if you got baptized in water. That's wonderful. It's a step of obedience, but it doesn't save you.

Listen. There are too many people who have gone down the aisle at a Christian meeting and gotten down on their knees and prayed the sinner's prayer but never put their faith in Jesus Christ. You think just saying a prayer, some magical formula—you can, believe me, you can say prayers all day long without meaning them. I know it because I've done it so what makes the difference? It's in the heart. Do you believe?

Paul has argued here that the godless who pretends there is no God, the educated moralist who loves to spend his time judging the sins of others, or the religionist who believes he's acceptable before God because of his knowledge and his effort and all of his observances—they're all in the same boat. They're all together under wrath. Each one of them is condemned as a sinner with no hope except for God.

And in the next chapter, Paul is going to give a summary. Let me put this on the screen very quickly for you. This is the summary. This is a little preview of what's going to happen probably next week, Lord willing:

Romans 3:9-12 (ESV)

...we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."

...we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: "None is righteous (right?), no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."

He's quoting there at the end from the Psalms. Now, if all of this talk today has left you feeling hopeless, I want you to know you've heard exactly what God wanted you to hear.

If you're responding to this message by going, I think my goose is cooked, then you have heard exactly what he wants you to hear, because the apostle Paul is attempting to paint a hopeless picture of man's sin. That's what he's been trying to do. But the reason he's doing it is so that later in this letter, he might spotlight God's solution.

And please understand, Christians, I don't want anybody walking out of the doors of this place today, or within the sound of my voice, or listening to us on the internet, to feel that this thing is hopeless. It is not hopeless.

It's hopeless for you outside of God, but you come to Him, you put your faith in Him, you trust in Him for forgiveness of sins—you have all the hope in the world, right? So this is not a hopeless situation, but we need to paint it as such so that we will recognize we need this savior that God sent, this person, Jesus Christ.

I need him. I need him bad. In fact, I am hopeless without Him. Hopeless—no hope, no chance of getting this thing done without Him. And that's why we took time this morning to recognize the body and the blood of Jesus, because that's the mechanism through which God has injected hope into our hopelessness and life into our death and light into our darkness.