

## LESSON 5

October 1, 2023

### Unit II: Faith Triumphs, Law Fails

# A Matter of the Heart

DEVOTIONAL READING: Ezekiel 36:25-30

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Romans 2:1-29

PRINT PASSAGE: Romans 2:12-24, 28-29

### KEY VERSE

**He is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.**

(Romans 2:29, KJV)

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**No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God.** (Romans 2:29, NIV)

### LESSON AIMS

**As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:**

- **Critically evaluate your assumptions of “right” and “wrong.”**
- **Internalize God’s law so that it is written on your hearts.**
- **Prayerfully examine your conscience before making major life choices.**

### \*KEY TERMS

**Judgment** (verse 3 [Background Scripture])—Greek: *krisis* (kree'-sis): a separating, sundering, separation; selection; justice.

**Persistence** (verse 7 [Background Scripture])—Greek: *hupomoné* (hoop-om-on-ay'): a patient, steadfast waiting for; steadfastness; endurance; “patient continuance” (KJV).

**Repentance** (verse 4 [Background Scripture])—Greek: *metanoia* (met-an'-oy-ah): a changing of the mind; a changing in the inner man.

**\*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)**

### INTRODUCTION

After reading selected verses from Psalm 51, the late Rev. J. R. Raynor announced the sermon's title for the day: “Whitewashing and Washing White.” He used two contrasting observations from his boyhood to explain the difference as the foundation for developing



### The Biblical Context

Paul wrote the book of Romans from Corinth toward the close of his third missionary journey (ca. AD 56). The apostle's primary purpose was to teach those who had not received apostolic instructions about the Gospel of grace. Roman's primary theme is God's righteousness—the good news that God justifies and acquits condemned sinners by grace through faith in Christ alone.

Structurally, Romans presents this doctrine's theological truths (see chapters 1–11) and their practical application (see chapters 12–16). Before developing Roman's thematic emphases, Paul uncovers humanity's need for God's righteousness—their unrighteous depravity (see Romans 1). In chapter 2, he reveals that the heart's condition matters in a relationship with God, not the outward appearance of morality.

the sermon's applicable principle. First, he compared boiling white sheets and pillowcases with lye soap in a black washpot and rinsing them in “bluing water” to whitewashing fences, houses, or barns to make them look clean and attractive.

He explained that the laborious washing process deep cleaned the bedding from the inside out, but whitewashing a structure merely covered its actual condition. From a distance, the bedding hanging out to dry and the whitewashed structures looked similar in cleanliness and attractiveness. However, a close inspection would reveal the difference.

Spiritually, his example explained the difference between behavior resulting from an internal cleansing of the heart and external religious performance masking an unconverted heart. Rev. Raynor challenged his listeners to realize that the heart's internal condition matters most to God. Jesus taught this principle during His earthly ministry while denouncing the religious hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees. He even called them “whitewashed” sepulchers that looked good on the outside while covering up their internal evil motives and deeds. The choices we make, the attitudes we possess, and everything we do must emanate from hearts that have been cleansed, made white by the blood of Jesus. Otherwise, we are just “whitewashed fences” and “whited sepulchers.”

## ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

### No Defense (*Romans 2:12-16*)

#### KJV

**12 For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law;**

**13 (For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.**

**14 For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves:**

**15 Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;)**

**16 In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.**

#### **NIV**

**12 All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law.**

**13 For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.**

**14 (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law.**

**15 They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.)**

**16 This will take place on the day when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.**

A moralist teaches or promotes morality (principles concerning the distinction between right and wrong or good and bad behavior). In Romans 2, Paul presents the truth that Gentile and Jewish moralists, specifically Jews, have no defense against God's judgment because they appear to be upright, moral, religious people whose sense of right and wrong led to outward virtuousness. Paul had just described the depravity of the flagrantly immoral (see Romans 1:29-31). The moralists among his readers would argue that this group deserved God's judgment. Still, they did not because they believed performing specific moral and religious works proved their righteousness. Paul emphasizes that God's judgment is impartial (see verse 11). He will deal with people according to the dispensation in which they live. Gentiles will be held accountable for their sins, but according to the standards of Christ, not the Law. However, the standards of the Law will judge Jews who lived before Christ because they were recipients of the Law (**verse 12**). Regularly hearing the Law did not lead to righteousness as the Jews believed, but practicing obedience to it made one right with God (**verse 13**).

Humanity's innate moral code may result in a good, upstanding life. Paul refers to this truth in **verses 14 and 15**. Jews looked down on Gentiles because they did not have the Law. However, Paul pointed out that there are moral Gentiles who naturally fulfill the Law's requirements, demonstrating that these requirements are "written on their hearts." This truth was confirmed by their consciences, accompanied by their thoughts accusing or excusing them of sin. The good deeds and avoidance of evil showed that Gentiles possessed an internal knowledge of God's law, making them a law for themselves and a witness against them in judgment. Hence, God's judgment of Gentiles will be as fair and consistent for them as for Jews who lived under the Mosaic Law. Everyone has a conscience; therefore, one can be guilty of sin even without a detailed list of dos and don'ts (see 1 John 3:20).

The final judgment based on Christ's Gospel will judge "hidden things" (thoughts and secrets) as well as actions (**verse 16**). God will reward, Jew or Gentile, based on whether they have been declared righteous through Jesus Christ.

## **Q WHAT DO YOU THINK?**

How would you explain to believers and nonbelievers that moral behavior alone does not make one righteous in God's sight?

### **Practice, Not Possession (*Romans 2:17-24*)**

#### **KJV**

17 Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God,  
18 And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law;  
19 And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness,  
20 An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.  
21 Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?  
22 Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?  
23 Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?  
24 For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written.

#### **NIV**

17 Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and boast in God;  
18 if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law;  
19 if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark,  
20 an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of little children, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth—  
21 you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal?  
22 You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?  
23 You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law?  
24 As it is written: “God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”

In the secular world, there is a saying that “Possession is nine-tenths of the law,” meaning that ownership is easier to maintain if one has possession of something or is difficult to enforce if one does not. John Lennon once said, “Possession isn’t nine-tenths of the law. It is nine-tenths of the problem.” One may accurately apply Lennon’s quote to the Jews as custodians of the Mosaic Law.

After proving to moralist Jews and Gentiles that neither group will have any basis for a defense against God's judgment, Paul exclusively focuses on the Jews, God's covenant people. Although they possessed the Law, doing so made them more accountable to God. First, Paul deflates their boast of spiritual security because of their racial and religious heritage (**verse 17**). They prided themselves on being Jews and considered themselves especially favored by God. Yet, they had forgotten their responsibility to God and humanity that accompanied this privilege.

Next, Paul lists other moral and religious elements which the Jews glorified and used to elevate themselves above Gentiles. They prided themselves on being aware of God's desires and plan. They were concerned about being spiritually superior due to continuous instruction in the Law (**verse 18**). Additionally, the Jews confidently counted themselves as the most religiously wise and qualified to mentor, guide, and instruct those without the benefit of God's written revelation (**verses 19-20**). Despite these claims, they fell short of God's expectations (**verses 21-22**). They failed to "practice what they preached" and to demonstrate "right doctrine" through "right practice." The result was a ruined reputation as Jews and staining God's reputation among Gentiles (**verses 23-24**).

Paul's revelation to the Jews is an important threefold reminder to the church. First, Christians prove their knowledge of the Word through understanding and life application. Second, believers identify themselves as Christian disciples by living out the character that the name requires. Finally, every Christian must live so that their testimony draws others to Christ and glorifies God's name in the world.

### **Q WHAT DO YOU THINK?**

**How can the faith community promote the need to balance sound doctrine and practice?**

### **The Inside Counts (*Romans 2:28-29*)**

#### **KJV**

**28 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:**

**29 But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.**

#### **NIV**

**28 A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical.**

**29 No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God.**

In verses 25-29, Paul clarified the significance of the external rite of circumcision, dispelling the Jews' claim that it made them spiritually superior to the Gentiles. Outward circumcision

was of no value if the circumcised Jew failed to practice and obey the Law. Likewise, external religious practice is valueless if one's lifestyle does not reflect obedience to God's Word. It is not outward circumcision that makes one a Jew (**verse 28**). The genuine Jew is the one who has experienced internal circumcision of the heart by the Holy Spirit and seeks God's praise and not humankind's (**verse 29**). Again, there is a powerful message to believers now in these verses—salvation is all a matter of the heart's spiritual condition, not external efforts to follow religious rules and regulations. All that we do emanates from the heart: discerning right from wrong, living right, and loving others. Our responsibility is to pursue becoming more like Jesus by practicing spiritual disciplines that produce spirituality.

### **WHAT DO YOU THINK?**

**What changes need to occur in local Christian education ministries to focus on producing more Christlike believers?**

### **A CLOSING THOUGHT**

This lesson, in its context, reminds us that salvation and its practice are a matter of the heart. Being a Christian is both a privilege and a responsibility. Its privilege is seen in the love of God for humanity to condescend to call them His children. The responsibility is to live in such a way that we bring honor and glory to Him by our character and works of righteousness. The ability and motivation to discern between right and wrong depend on the heart's spiritual condition, which in turn depends on having an intimate, obedient, and personal relationship with God.

### **YOUR LIFE**

This week, apply this lesson by evaluating your heart's spiritual condition through prayer and meditation. It would help if you remembered that no one has a defense against God's judgment because we all sin. So, begin your heart evaluation with confession followed by a prayer request that He create a clean heart in you and continues renewing your spirit daily.

### **YOUR WORLD!**

This lesson challenges the faith community to rethink and redefine its ministry of teaching to promote teaching for spiritual transformation as the priority. The Jews had the Law and knew the Law but failed to practice it. They could not practice it because they had not allowed its message to change their hearts. So likewise, possessing biblical knowledge is not a meaningful substitute for practicing its principles, and no one can practice the principles unless his or her heart is right with God.

### **CLOSING PRAYER**

Gracious Father, forgive us for failing to consistently practice what we preach. Please convict and move us to examine the condition of our hearts. Prepare our hearts to receive Your Word so that our lives will draw others to You and glorify Your name. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

CONCLUSION

(Preparing for Next Week’s Lesson)

Why do some people insist on breaking the Law? Next week, Paul explains this dilemma among believers (Romans 7:1-12).

Home Daily Bible Readings		
MONDAY, October 2	“The Law Reveals Sin”	(Deuteronomy 5:1-15)
TUESDAY, October 3	“Living with Others”	(Deuteronomy 5:16-22)
WEDNESDAY, October 4	“Who Will Rescue Me?”	(Romans 7:14-25)
THURSDAY, October 5	“Outward Piety Earns God’s Wrath”	(Jeremiah 7:1-15)
FRIDAY, October 6	“Dead to Sin; Alive in Christ”	(Romans 6:1-12)
SATURDAY, October 7	“Present Your Bodies to God”	(Romans 6:13-23)
SUNDAY, October 8	“Dead to the Law through Christ”	(Romans 7:1-13)

NOTES