
ROMANS: THE FOUNDATION OF CHRISTIAN TEACHING

WEEK 2 – RELIGIOUS PEOPLE NEED THE GOSPEL TOO

QUESTION 1) A twentieth-century theologian named Francis Schaeffer used to use an illustration of an invisible tape recorder. He said that if you wore one around your neck every day, recorded all the judgments you made of other people, and on the Last Day God judged you only on the basis of the words you've spoken as standards for human behavior, no one would pass.

On a scale of 1 to 10, how judgmental of a person do you consider yourself? Do you see this as a problem? What are the things that you struggle with judging others about the most? (Since most of us are fairly blind to our judgmentalism, imagine we called a close friend or co-worker – what would they say you are most judgmental about?)

QUESTION 2) Romans 1 & 2 are placing the same two types of people before us that Jesus does in his parable about the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). As a group, recall the details of that parable as well as the lessons Jesus is teaching.

BACKGROUND: In Romans 1, Paul showed that the pagan Gentile world had rejected God. This would have been eagerly supported by listeners of Jewish descent. But they also would have assumed they were exempt from such judgment because, after all, THEY were law-keeping Jews. Religious people today would largely have the same opinion – “Of course God’s wrath will eventually come down upon the immoral pagans!” But Paul’s twist in chapter 2 is that anyone who believes they stand in judgment upon the pagans is actually proving themselves worthy of judgment also.

GOD'S RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT (ROM. 2:1-16)

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. ² Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. ³ So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? ⁴ Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

⁵ But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. ⁶ God "will repay each person according to what they have done." ⁷ To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. ⁸ But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. ⁹ There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; ¹⁰ but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ¹¹ For God does not show favoritism.

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.

QUESTION 3) Verses 6-10 sound like Paul could be promoting works righteousness. Bible students, what is clear evidence (from last week) that this is NOT the case? (cf. Rom. 1:17) If not works righteousness, then how can Paul seem to be saying that we will be judged for doing "evil" or "good"?

QUESTION 4) Paul's parenthetical statement in verses 14-15 is perhaps the Bible's most fascinating statement on the Natural Knowledge of God. Put it in your own words. How might this truth impact our Christian witnessing?

QUESTION 5) Believers, like nonbelievers, are adept at fighting their consciences and rationalizing their poor words, attitudes, and behaviors. Share with the group something you struggle with that you are quick to defend.

THE JEWS AND THE LAW (ROM. 2:17-29)

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."

25 Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. 26 So then, if those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? 27 The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker.

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.

QUESTION 6) We don't have any biblical or historical evidence of Jewish believers "*robbing temples*" (vs. 22) as Paul suggests. This would seem to indicate he's speaking metaphorically. What do think Paul is suggesting? (cf. Jesus' teaching in Matt. 5:21-22 & 5:27-28).

QUESTION 7) Verses 25-29 take on new meaning if you replace “Jew” with “Christian/believer” or “circumcision” with a host of various Christian activities. What is Paul’s main point in these verses? What are some of the activities/ceremonies/checkboxes which Christians sometimes point to as causes for right relationship with God?

QUESTION 8) Paul makes a big deal with the Jews about circumcision. Circumcision is a cutting off of flesh at the source of life. And in Colossians 2:11 (ESV) Paul says, “*In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ.*” What do you think Paul is getting at? In what way was Jesus circumcised (i.e. cut off) to bring us into a covenant relationship with God?

SUMMARY: *Biblical knowledge, solid doctrine, spiritual rituals and activities, and moral behaviors are all privileges to be humbled by and gifts to be thankful for. They are NOT, however, reasons to boast. If Christians boast, it should be that God is so gracious that he chose to love, forgive, and embrace hypocrites like us. When this takes place, God’s name has a chance to be praised, not blasphemed, before the watching world.*

CLOSING PRAYER (GATHER PRAYER REQUESTS)
