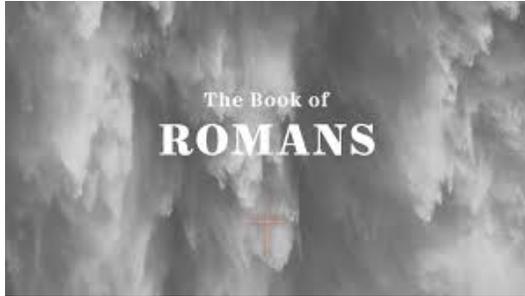


## **Religion Can't Save You**

### **Romans 2:1-29**

#### **Romans #5**

**Weekend of February 29-March 1, 2020**



#### **Introduction**

There's a book in my library called UnChristian that analyzes the results of this extensive, nationwide study conducted by the Barna group in which they sought to compare the lives Christians and non-Christians to see what the actual differences are.

**Here's a quick profile of Christians according to the survey...**

- **They found that Christians cuss less in public (they had to specify--not so much less in private, just in public or around Nana).**
- **They give a little bit more to the poor.**
- **They are less likely to recycle (because, you know, the world is just going to burn up anyway)**
- **Christians give more money to religious nonprofits.**
- **They buy fewer lottery tickets**

**According to the survey Christians are just as likely...**

- **To visit a pornographic website as those who are not.**
- **To get drunk.**
- **Just as likely to do illegal drugs or to take prescription medicines not prescribed to them.**
- **To be willing to lie to get out of a difficult situation**
- **To have intentionally done something to get back at someone within the last 30 days**
- **To have said an unkind thing about someone behind their back in the last 30 days**

Is this really what Jesus had in mind when he died to create a new race of people--that they would know we were his disciples by how we cussed less around grandma and bought less lottery tickets? Didn't he say they would know us by our love?

**Paul's point in Romans 2 is that religion is often just a thin veneer papered over a heart that is still every bit as sinful as everyone else's, and that religion by itself is powerless to change our hearts. It might change our behavior, but nothing deeper.**

Remember, in Romans 1, Paul has laid out his case for why all people need the gospel. He has painted a graphic picture of the corruption of the human race. And now, as he opens chapter 2, he anticipates an objection from his religious, Jewish readers. **Every time it says "Jew" in this chapter, you could sub-out, "church-going Christian"--because Paul's focus is on religious people--it's just that most of his audience happens to be religious Jews)**

## **Bible Study**

**“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.” Romans 2:1**

There it is--whenever you see the word therefore... he's pointing back to chapter 1 and saying that all of you who were just shaking your heads at how bad everyone was, pay attention. “

**Look within, religious person,” he says, “is your heart really any better?” Paul says, “You religious people think you're better because you know the Bible, know the right answers, and go to church... look at these next verses...**

**“He will render to each one according to his works...” Romans 2:6**

**“...but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality.” Romans 2:8-11**

So, Paul says, “God sees the heart, and when he evaluates us, what counts with God is not external conformity in religion, but inward transformation from the heart.”

Wait... Didn't Paul just get done explaining in chapter 1 that salvation is NOT earned through good works but given as a gift through faith alone? And now he is saying, vs. 6, that God will repay each of us according to our works?”

**Great question. Verse 6 is a quote from Psalm 62 in which the Psalmist is complaining about a group of religious people who honor God with their mouths while their feet are quick to run after violence. They give an external show of religion, but internally they are still filled with wickedness. Paul's point is that external practices of religion do not equal inward transformation.**

**This leads to what I will call the million dollar question: What does your life declare about your belief in, or your surrender to, Jesus? Look at verses 13-16...**

**“For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. 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; on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.” Romans 2:13-16**

He makes the point: it's not not having the law, or knowing the Bible, that matters. It is whether you obey the laws from the heart that would make you right with God. That's addressed to the Jews. The Gentiles have the law written on their hearts and they obey it sometimes, too, just like you do.

**But possessing the law is not what makes a person right with God--only doing the law, from the heart, if that were even possible, would make someone right with God. He's**

pointing to the fact that underneath the heart of the religious person is the same corrupt heart that exists in the Gentiles--just a "religified" version of it. One day, God is going to expose the hearts of both Jews and Gentiles both--and we'll see through all the religious observance down to what their hearts are really like. And that's not going to be a good day for anybody--not Jew or Gentile.

It was the 16th century reformer **John Calvin** who made this comment regarding this passage...

**"We can prove from this passage that no one is justified by works; for if they alone are justified by the law who fulfill the law, it follows that no one is justified; for no one can boast of having fulfilled the law."**

The 10 Commandments are probably the best example of where your heart stands with God: I'll read a few of the commandments, and give you a short explanation of it, and if you feel like you pretty consistently keep it, check yes. If not, check no.

### **Do You Keep The 10 Commandments?**

**Commandment 1-You shall have no other gods before me:** You never put anything before God in my life. I have never loved or trusted or obeyed anything more than God. God has always been preeminent in my thoughts, affections, and actions. Worshipping him has always been the greatest passion in my life.

**Commandment 3-You shall not take my name in vain:** I have always held the name of God in highest respect, never uttering it carelessly.\*\* Nor have I ever desecrated God's name by calling myself his follower yet not representing him well. The way I talk, act, spend money, and drive give honor to the God whose name I attach to my life and whose bumper sticker I plaster on my car.

**Commandment 4-Honor your Father and Mother:** Honor your parents: I have always respected and obeyed the authorities in my life, and given them honor and willing obedience whether they were watching or not. This includes my parents, my teachers, traffic cops, and the IRS.

**Commandment 7-You shall not commit adultery:** I have never had sex outside the bonds of marriage nor have I ever entertained sexual thoughts about someone I'm not married to.

**Commandment 9-You shall not lie:** I've never bent the truth to get out of a bad situation. I've never stretched the truth to make myself look better. I have never slandered anyone. I have always told the truth in every situation regarding every person I have ever known, and I've always fully fulfilled any promises I've made.

How are you doing?

**"But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God..." Romans 2:17**

**"You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you." Romans 2:22-24**

**Paul says, “When you look down into your heart motives, don’t you do the very things you tell others not to do?”**

**You say not to worship idols, but you know that idol-worshiping is more than the physical act of bowing down to a statue. You use religion to get things from God instead of getting more of God.**

All the Gentiles and unchurched people can see that under this thin veneer of religion you have the same corrupt heart as everyone else. And, if anything, your religion has just made you worse.

**Religiosity is like this strange disease--when you have it, it makes everyone around you want to vomit.**

### **Application**

#### **What Does Religiosity Make Us?**

**Smug:** You just walk around with this subtle but nauseating air about you, “I have everything together. I don’t have the problems you people have because I just do a better job than you and, generally speaking, a better class of person than you.” Here’s a second thing it will make us...

**Overly-sensitive:** Because your identity is built on your righteousness, people can’t ever undermine it or question it--if they do it is deeply bothersome or devastating. Ask yourself: When someone confronts you about your sin, do you get defensive? Do you start mentally listing all the problems THEY have? Or do you receive that rebuke and legitimately ask God to help you hear it? Here’s the next one...

**Judgmental:** You need to find other’s faults so you can feel good about yourself--so you are really critical of others, always finding fault--you are the kind of person that can point out something wrong with everyone. **Tim Keller** in his commentary on Romans says..

**“You will be at best cold, and at worst outright condemning, toward those who are struggling. Rather than speaking words of encouragement to the struggler, helping to lift them up, you speak words of gossip about them to others, to show yourself in a comparatively good light. A sign of this condition is that people don’t want to share their problems with you, and you are very defensive if others point out your problems to you.”** Look at this next idea...

**Hypocritical:** Hypocrites have what I call a “theoretical-only” stance toward God’s Word. They like to learn concepts of truth more than they want to be confronted by them. They like to write down concepts of truth more than they love to be changed by concepts of truth. The irony here is that the Bible was not written for our information but for our transformation.

Quoting **Tim Keller** again...**“A real Christian finds the Bible ‘living and active;’ when they hear it or read it, they are convicted, comforted, thrilled, disturbed, melted, slammed down or lifted up.”** Here’s the last idea...

**Insecure:** Insecurity manifests in the inner soul questions: Am I good enough? Do others consider me a good person? Does God consider me a good person? What is the result of our religiosity?

**The result is irreligious people blaspheme God because of us. They dislike the God we claim to represent. Look at verses 25-29**

**“For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. 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.” Romans 2:25-29**

**Circumcision was... outward sign of the Jewish covenant. In our day, we could replace circumcision here with “baptism.” So you got baptized--your body was dipped in water--but does your heart show signs of being cleansed? You take communion, but are you showing the inward effects of transforming grace? Does your life show evidence of Jesus living on the inside?**

Paul is saying: Beware religious inoculation. Inoculation: give you a dead version of the disease so if you are exposed to the real thing you won't catch it. One last Tim Keller quote on this passage...

**“It is possible to trust in Christianity, rather than Christ. And this can happen in conservative, evangelical churches. Paul is showing us a condition called ‘dead orthodoxy,’ where the basic doctrines of the Bible are accurately subscribed to, but do not make any internal difference. There is an intellectual grasp of the gospel, but no internal revolution.”**

Paul's point: Religion can't change you. Only the gospel can. And that gospel has to be embraced DEEP in your heart.