

## Romans Part 1: The Problem, Romans 2:12-29, 11/3/19

I've never been audited yet, but from what I hear it isn't fun. It exposes every little financial decision to bright lights of the IRS laws. The first three chapters of Romans Paul is doing a spiritual audit of humanity, nothing fun about that either, because in the process he exposing our hearts to the bright light of God's holiness to see every bit of suppression of truth, idolatry, hypocrisy, excuses, self-righteousness and our comparison to others. Sobering isn't it? But it is by coming face-to-face with our dark reality that makes the jewel of the gospel shine brightly. Today, in this spiritual audit, Romans 2:12-29 will expose the flaws in the two prominent beliefs systems in the world today, and why it is that when we finally meet the final judge, our maker, both systems will fail us.

### 1) Relativism will fail you.

Romans 2:12-16

*<sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> (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.*

*<sup>15</sup> 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.) <sup>16</sup> This will take place on the day when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.*

Paul says there are two types of people. There are those with the law and those without it, v.12. In this context, the Law is the truth of God revealed in the Scriptures. There are those who believe in absolute truth, that there is defined, revealed morality, and immorality that is based on the character of God. In Jesus' day these were mainly the religious Jews. Today, we might call this moralism. And there are those who do not have the law (v.14) in this case the Gentiles, those who operated by their own morality, their own desires. Those who do not embrace the absolute truth of God, who don't have it or they reject it. In our context today, relativism. I define my own morality and standard that is right for me, all truths are equal, no one or no culture can tell anyone else what is right or wrong...There are no absolutes. Now many people would not even identify themselves with this title, but their actions confirm it. Story of businessman bragging about scam, then later talks about the importance of being a man of your word in business. So truth, honesty and integrity are important except when they are not. In the passage we learn three things about relativism: one that is predictable, one that is surprising, one that is alarming.

**Predictable: v.14-15a.** Everyone, regardless of cultures, religions, across socioeconomics and generations, agree on some basic virtues. Love, should be kind, murder is wrong, we shouldn't lie and cheat... God has imprinted his moral DNA on our souls and our consciences bear witness to this.

**Surprising: v.12-** What is the standard by which the relativist will be judged? Paul seems to suggest that God will not judge the gentile according to the same standards as the Jew. If you don't accept the Bible as your ultimate standard, you won't be judged according to that standard, but rather according to the moral standards you know and accept during your lifetime. No one will ever be able to rise before God and declare that he has been unfair.

**Alarming: v.12,16-** At the final audit, relativism will fail you. Because no one will live up to their own moral standards. Francis Schaeffer illustrates it in this way:

"If every little baby that was ever born anywhere in the world had a tape recorder hung about its neck, and if this tape recorder only recorded the moral judgments with which this child as he grew bound other men, the moral precepts might be much lower than the biblical law, but they would still be moral judgments. Eventually each person comes to that great moment when he stands before God as judge. Suppose, then, that God simply touched the tape recorder button and each man heard played out in his own words all those statements by which he had bound other men in moral judgment. He could hear it going on for years—thousands and thousands of moral judgments made against other men...Then God would simply say to the man, though he had never heard the Bible, now where do you stand in the light of your own moral judgments? The Bible points out . . . that every voice would be stilled. All men would have to acknowledge that they have deliberately done those things which they knew to be wrong. Nobody could deny it."

I will tell you, this really hit me before I came to faith in Christ. I had realized that I couldn't live up to my already low standards. What about you? This is why the modern gospel of sincerity falls short.

## 2) Moralism will fail you. v.17-24

<sup>17</sup> *Now you, if you call yourself a Jew...* Paul now turns his attention to the moralist, religious Jews who were holding onto their religious status as righteousness before God. Paul lists out 6 reasons they held tightly for their self-righteousness.

1. Nationality: You call yourself a Jew (v.17)
2. Security in the Law: Rely on access to the Law (v.17)
3. Chosen Ones: You brag about your relationship to God. (v.17)
4. Ethical Standards: You know his will and approve of what is superior (v.18)
5. Mastery of the Law: Instructed by the law (v.18) Quote and cross-reference.
6. Moral Leaders: You are convinced you are a guide to the blind. (v.19) They think they can see, others can't.

Paul says, OK this is who you say you are and why you believe you are righteous. Let's do a spiritual audit and see how you are doing in living up to this.

Romans 2:21-24 <sup>21</sup> *you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal?* <sup>22</sup> *You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?* <sup>23</sup> *You who boast in the law, do you*

*dishonor God by breaking the law? <sup>24</sup> As it is written: "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."*

Paul's questions are meant to strike at the heart of the 10 Commandments. And the answer to each of the questions, "yes you do." Because in the same way that Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount said that adultery is not only the physical, it is what happens in the heart when you lust after someone who is not your spouse. And Paul in no uncertain terms, reveals that Moralism will fail you at the end of the day because the weight God's holy standards will crush you.

Maybe today, if you are honest, you feel a bit like the Jews of Paul's day. I'm good with God because I go to church, I know the Bible and have memorized verses, my family has always been active in the church, I was baptized and I'm a member. So I'm good and better than most. Let's do a little exercise to make this more tangible. Some of you love taking those little quizzes in magazines that tell you what you are really like. Who know which character from Toy Story you are, or what kind of cheese you are...I'm blue cheese by the way. Here's a biblical one for you: The 10 Commandments are probably the best example of where your heart stands with God: Let's do a little quiz. Take out a piece of paper and number 1-10, I'll read a few of the commandments, and give you a short explanation of it, and if you feel like you keep it, check yes. If not, check no.

**1. You shall have no other gods before me:**

I have never put anything before God in my life. I have never loved or trusted or obeyed anything more than God. God has always been pre-eminent in my thoughts, affections, and actions. Worshipping him has always been the greatest passion in my life. YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

**2. 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. Never talking back to them, rolling my eyes. YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

**3. 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. YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

**4. You shall not covet:** I have never been greedy for something that wasn't mine, nor have I been jealous of the abilities, looks, position or possessions of others. I have rejoiced with others in what they have, glad that they have it even when I don't. I have never complained about what God has provided for me and always been thankful and fully content with what I have and where I am in life. YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_ **OK, let's all trade with our neighbors to see how we did...**

Moralism's fatal flaw is it cannot protect or prevent the heart from sinning; all it can do is seek to hide that sin behind outward rules and self-deception. It has no answer to, and no power to remove selfishness, lust, envy, anger and pride...Moralism is a dead faith.

**Diagnosing a Dead Faith:** How might I know if I'm in danger of a dead faith?

**1) You have a head-deep but not heart-deep faith.** The religious Jews felt a false-sense of security because they were around the things of God, knew their Bibles inside and out, but it was not changing them from the inside out. Never truly came with a sense of desperation. What about us?

Paul is saying: *Beware religious inoculation.* This is one of most important concepts for those of you who have grown up in church! Inoculation: gives you a dead version of the disease so if you are exposed to the real thing you won't catch it. If we catch a dead version of faith (head deep), we may not catch the real thing (heart, embrace for ourselves). We are around it, participating, and it can cause us to have a false sense of security, all the while never catching the real thing. Has the gospel traveled that 18" between your head and your heart?

**2) You feel morally superior.** Jews thought they were the guides for the blind. They looked down their noses at everyone else. The religious Jews thought they were the good people and everyone else were the bad people, **blind to the reality that the line between good and bad runs down the center of every human heart.** Ask yourself: When you hear about your friend's kid acting up in school, is your gut response, "My kid would never do that because I am such a great parent" or is it, "Dang, parenting is impossible" and "my kid's got problems, too and thank God for his grace because if not all our kids would be doomed"? When I hear a pastor who failed out of ministry, do I think- "He deserves it, I would never do that?" or "I am 7 seconds from destroying my marriage, my ministry and doing damage to everyone, so I need God's grace and your prayers."

Relativism will fail you, Moralism will fail you. So what are we left with?

**3) Our only hope. v.25-27**

What is our only hope? **A circumcised heart.** In these verses Paul is talking about the problem of relying on the Jewish rite of circumcision for righteousness. We need to understand the significance of the covenant sign of circumcision. In ancient times you didn't sign your name to bind a deal. You acted out the curse that you would accept if you broke the covenant. So one might cut an animal in half and walk between the pieces to say: If I disobey this covenant, may I die as this animal has. Circumcision was God's covenant sign...is a cutting off in a very intimate and personal way. So what God was saying to Abraham was: if you want to be in relationship with me, you need to be circumcised as a sign to you and everyone that, if you break covenant, you will be cut off completely. Cut off from others, life, from me. But here's the problem, no one does keep the covenant. So how can God have any people at all? How can anyone be right with him? This is Paul's point. It is not outward righteousness that saves.

<sup>28</sup> *A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. <sup>29</sup> 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.*

Because the cutting off of which circumcision was a sign has already happened. In Christ on the cross, we have been circumcised in our hearts. In his death, Jesus was cut off. He was forsaken by his father, cut off from him. Cut off from land of living (Isaiah 53:8). He was truly circumcised. He was bearing the curse of covenant-breaking. He was suffering the curse that law-breakers, deserve.