

Romans 2

The Moralist and the Religionist

Pastor Paul LeBoutillier · June 07, 2026

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

All right, are we all good? Romans chapter 2, are you there? Good. This is just our third study through Romans, and so if you're joining us for the first time, just want to let you know you haven't missed much, and that's a good thing. But speaking of missing something, I want you to take a moment to imagine what it was like to be the recipients of this letter.

And prior to receiving this letter from the Apostle Paul, I want to remind you that these people probably had very little understanding of what it meant to be a Christian. They had obviously received the gospel, but Paul had never been there. Paul had never gotten to Rome, and we don't even know who did make it. And obviously someone came with the gospel, shared the gospel, people were responding. But you know, for the most part, these people had very little to go on.

I mean, they would have had the Old Testament Hebrew Scriptures, which of course had been translated into Greek many years before, so they had that Old Testament element of the Word of God. But you know, as far as their Christian faith goes, and what it means to be a believer, and really why, Jesus had to come and sacrifice Himself in the first place. I'm sure a lot of that was missing. That last song we did, Wonder of Oz, beautiful song by the way, but we talk about sometimes how when we all get to heaven, we're going to know things that we don't know now. Now we see in a mirror dimly, the Bible says, can you imagine what it was like for the Romans before the New Testament was fully written?

I mean, talk about seeing dimly. There was a lot they didn't know. And so it seems clear from the content of this letter that the Apostle Paul was aware of the fact that these people lacked critical content and fundamental understanding that you and I frankly take for granted, you know. And so he penned this letter as a way of helping them understand why Jesus had to come, why He had to die on the cross and give His life for our sins. But of course, that's the good news.

Before you can get to the good news with anybody, every single person has to make their way through the bad news. You have to navigate the bad news before you can get to the good news. And really, these

first few chapters of Romans are kind of the bad news. And if you can get through these first few chapters of Romans, you're probably going to be okay, you know, because this is where it's a little bit more challenging. Chapters 1 and 2 essentially explain why the wrath of God is coming upon the earth.

And to do this, the Apostle Paul, you'll remember the last time we were together, talked about how the human race or humankind is essentially divided into three basic groups. And we put them on the screen last week, I'll do it again this week so you can see it. Essentially they are divided into the godless, the moralist, and the religionist. You'll notice that he talked about the godless in chapter 1. And these would essentially be pagans and other people who just have no concept of the one true God or the word of God and the revelation of God.

And then here in this chapter, we're going to get to the moralist. And this is kind of the self-righteous person for the most part. And then we're going to talk about the religionist. And by the way, I've been all three. And I don't say that to be funny.

But I've been all three. I have been godless, I have been a moralist, and I have been a religionist. And the Apostle Paul is going to argue for the fact that all three are under the wrath of God. And that's what we're going to be doing here. So what we're going to do first is read through the chapter, the entire chapter.

And then we're going to pray and then we're going to come back and unpack these verses as we do, okay? So follow along with me. I'm going to be reading here out of the ESV. Goes like this, 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. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. 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? 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? But because of your hard and impenitent heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

He will render to each one according to his works. To those who by patience and well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. 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.

And I'll stop there for just a moment to remind you that Greek is Paul's word for Gentile. Because of course, in his world, that was the predominant expression of the Gentile world at that time, the Greeks. And so, there you go, that'll happen several times. Verse 10, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality.

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. 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, by the way consider circling that word, 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.

But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God and know his will and approve what is excellent because you are instructed from the law, and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth, you then who teach others do not teach yourself. While you preach against stealing, do you steal? 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. 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? And he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you, whoever 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. See why we need to pray? All right, Father, thank you so much. Thank you for your word.

Help us to make sense of this chapter, Lord. Help us to do a deep dive into what you're saying to us here because, Lord, we want to be students of the word. We want to learn to rightly divide the word of truth. We want to be nourished tonight from the scriptures, and we pray that you'd help us to do that. Help us, Lord, to tune into your Holy Spirit, and I pray, my Father, that you would speak to each and every person here, knowing what each one needs the most.

We thank you and praise you for your incredible goodness. Be with us, we pray in Jesus' precious name, amen, amen. In the first 16 verses of this chapter, the Apostle Paul addresses who we're referring to as the educated moralist, and again, this is the person who knows right from wrong. They don't necessarily know anything about God. They might.

They might even say, I believe in God, but ultimately, they're not a religionist. They're a moralist, and they know that there are things that are right, and there are things that are wrong, and Paul starts off this chapter, he comes out swinging by saying, therefore, you have no excuse. Oh man, every one of you who judges or as the new King James says, therefore you are inexcusable. Oh man, because you see, the educated moralist is a person who believes that they're better off than everyone else because of the fact that they know right from wrong. And you know, we looked at the godless person in the last chapter, and the educated moralist would say, I'm glad I'm not like that person.

I'm glad I'm not a godless person who doesn't understand anything about right or wrong or good or bad, and you know, that sort of thing. And they truly believe that they are better. They're better human beings. And moralists would come out and say that. I'm better than those people who are immoral.

There are a lot of people in this world who are immoral, the moralist would say. I'm glad I'm not them, you know. And so what happens is they naturally become judgmental. In other words, they look down their nose at other people, but the problem is they're not just judgmental, they're also hypocritical. Because while this person, the moralist, and like I said, I've been this person.

While the moralist is busy looking at the sins and foibles of other people, they are blind to the fact that they are also full of faults. And they tend not to look at their own. They're very good at looking at other people's faults, but they don't typically look at their own. And that's why Paul says, in this text, he says, for in passing judgment on another, you actually condemn yourself because you're guilty of the same stuff. And that's the essence of what he's saying.

And so you can see, this is the problem. The moralist is attuned to uncovering what is sinful in other people but fails to realize what is sinful in their own lives. And they struggle in this area. They struggle with understanding that they are just as guilty as the godless person. They're no better off.

Just because they know right from wrong doesn't make them better off, doesn't make them a better human being. You know, we want to believe, and the moralist is like this. The moralist wants desperately to believe that people are inherently good. And you hear people say that all the time. And that doesn't bother me.

What bothers me is when I hear Christians say it. Because when a Christian or somebody who claims to be a follower of Jesus says something like, well, I believe people are inherently good, they are literally betraying the Word of God by making that statement. Because the Bible is very clear about the fact that people are not inherently good. Jesus said to the rich young ruler, there's nobody good but God. And that leaves you and me out.

Right? So, you know, I mean, Jesus has that wonderful way of slapping us all in the face with the truth. Sometimes, though, we don't want to hear it. And just like the moralist, we don't like that truth. And so we tend to want to believe what we want to believe, because it makes us feel better, I suppose.

I believe people are inherently good. No, they're not. They're inherently evil. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, the Bible tells us. We all like sheep have gone astray.

Each one has turned to his own way. That's what the Bible says, you know. So the Bible doesn't support the tendency of the moralist to believe that people are inherently good except those other people, right? And so all these things the moralist tends to forget. And so what they do is they create in their minds a false narrative of goodness that they believe belongs to them, and so forth.

So to help this person see reality, Paul begins in verse three to ask a series of questions. Look with me in your Bible. He says, 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? And again, like I said, the moralist tends to see his behavior as above reproach, and therefore, you know, someone who naturally, he believes he naturally pleases God. He may not think about God a whole lot.

But if you were to ask him or her, who is the moralist, do you believe you're living a life pleasing to God? They'd say, Well, I think so. Because I have a sense of right and wrong. And I know that what is right and what and I try my best to always do what is right and what is good, right? And they really truly believe that.

So Paul goes on to ask in verse four, if you look with me again in your Bible, he says, Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is actually meant to lead you to repentance? And what Paul is saying here is the fact that you're not instantly judged for the sin that God sees in your life, you're taking as proof that God is pleased with you. But what you're doing is you're presuming upon the riches of the kindness of God, the fact that he hasn't struck you dead yet. You know, you're saying, Well, he obviously thinks I'm okay. You know, I'm still living.

Here I am. I know what's right. I know what's wrong. I try to live by what is right. And that's all a person can do is try.

God certainly sees my effort. The moralist usually, if he does believe in God, he usually thinks God grades on a curve. And, you know, he likes to compare himself to other people and say, I'm not as bad as that guy, you know. And Paul explains here in verse 4 that the fact that you haven't been judged yet is quite simply just proof of God's kindness. It's not proof of your morality or your righteous standing.

It's simply proof of God's kindness. God is gracious and kind and longsuffering. And that's why you're still here. Now remember, he's talking to the moralist, okay? But God's kindness was never meant to lull anyone into a false sense of security as it relates to their lives.

It was meant, and Paul tells us here, what God's kindness was meant to do. It's meant to lead us to repentance, you know. But mankind largely refuses. Look at verse 5 in your Bible. Paul goes on, he says, but because of your hard and impenitent, your Bible may say unrepentant heart, you're storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

Again, he's talking to the moralist. It's very important that you understand as you read the book of Romans that Paul is establishing these different groups of people. And he's talking to those groups of people. And it's important that you not be unsettled by this. If you are a believer who's trusting in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins, these things don't specifically apply to you, and you have to understand that.

But it is important for these believers in Roman, the believers in this room, to understand the basic sort of thing that Paul is establishing here, and that is apart from Jesus, okay? Apart from Jesus, all mankind is under God's wrath, is under the curse of sin. All mankind. That's what he's establishing here. Okay?

Now, as we read and look again at verses 6 through 11, Paul's going to make some statements about judgment as it relates to works. And I want you to be very careful as we read through these verses, because if you didn't really know your Bible very well, and you went to a church where they were preaching works, you got to be a good person, you know, to be saved sort of a thing. They might use this as a proof text to show that people who do good are going to heaven, and people who do bad are not. And it seems very cut and dry when you look at these verses. But you can't divorce these verses from the rest of the Bible.

And again, what Paul is doing here is he's establishing a principle of judgment by works, okay? Not salvation by works, but judgment by works. Now, he's going to talk about salvation by works. I'm going to

tell you that ahead of time. He talks in these verses about and what it sounds like salvation by works, but he's establishing a principle.

Please understand this, and I want to explain this. The principle is this. If you could do the works of God that are required perfectly, you would be saved by those. Okay? Now, the Bible makes it very clear that, and we're going to get to this when we get to Romans chapter three, and Paul is going to come out and very clearly say, no one is going to be declared righteous through the law, okay?

He's going to say that. But here, he's establishing a principle, and the principle is if you could be good enough, you could earn your salvation by being good enough. Okay? Nobody can. But if it's possible, you know.

And that's why when Jesus was talking to the rich young ruler, and the rich young ruler wasn't listening, he said, what good deeds must I do to have eternal life? Jesus started going through the law, right? He started, do this, do this, do this, do this, right? Because what was Jesus? He was doing the exact same thing.

He was establishing the principle. If you could That'd be enough, but you gotta keep the law perfectly. And if you break one law, one time, it's all over. You're condemned, okay? So, as we go through these verses, remember, it's the principle.

So let's read, verse six. It says, he will render to each one, according to his works, okay? To those who by patience in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. That's the principle. But for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.

And that's the group we all come under, okay? None of us comes under the first category. So, verse nine, Paul writes, there will be tribulation. That just means trouble. He's not talking about the great tribulation.

There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek. Why the Jew first? Have you ever wondered? Paul actually says that several times here in this book. Talks about the Jew first and then the Gentile.

Why the Jews first? Well, because they received the oracles of God. They received the word of God. They had the revelation of God. The Messiah comes from the Jewish people.

They have the promises of God. They have the righteous requirements of God established in the law. And you know what happens when you have information? You have greater responsibility with that information. I'm gonna make you regret coming to church tonight.

Because you know, the more information you get, the more responsibility you have. And that's why he says to the Jew first, because they're the ones that received the revelation of God, right? So he says in verse 10, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek, for God shows no partiality. Again, he's establishing that principle, okay? And by the way, the word that is translated partiality here speaks of making unfair distinctions between people, treating some people different than you would treat other people.

But we're told here that God doesn't do that. He doesn't show any partiality in judgment. All are judged the same. We are all judged the same, right? Some of the Jewish rabbis actually taught that those who heard and received the law would be judged differently.

And they told the people, you know, you don't need to worry because you've heard the word of God. You've heard the law and you're gonna be judged differently than other people. But that's why Paul goes on. Look what he says in verse 12. He says, for all who have sinned without the law, referring to those who have never heard the law, like the Jews did, he says they will also perish without the law.

But look at this. And all who have sinned under the law, these are people who've heard the law, they will be judged by the law. And again, Paul is simply making the point that judgment comes to both without partiality. God doesn't distinguish just because of something you've heard necessarily, okay? And then he goes on to say this.

For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. And again, he's stating the principle, okay? The principle here. But you know, like I already quoted, he's gonna tell us that, he's gonna talk about keeping the law here. But let me put on the screen again what I've already quoted to you from Romans chapter three, verse 20, where he said, by works of the law, no human being will be justified in his sight.

Okay, you can't take away what Paul says in verse three apart from the principle he's establishing in chapter two. Okay? So Paul's not contradicting himself. He's not saying in chapter two, if you're good enough, you can make it to heaven. And then in chapter three, you're going, oh, I guess you can't be good enough.

No, that's not a contradiction. First, it's a principle. So he goes on to speak of the written law of God that is imprinted on every man's conscious. You'll remember, I encourage you to maybe circle that word or take note of it. And he says in verse 14, for when Gentiles who do not have the law, and he's referring to the Mosaic law that was given to the people of Israel.

And yet by nature, he says, do what the law requires. They are a law to themselves even though they do not have the law. And what is it they show? Verse 15, they show that the work of the law is actually 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. What Paul is essentially saying here is that ignorance of the law will be no excuse when men's lives are judged.

Whether you've heard the law or whether you have the law or whatever, why is ignorance no excuse? Well, it's because God has given to every man a conscience. And so whether you've ever heard the law of God, so now we're gonna get a little bit deeper into this. You know, the Jews prided themselves that they had the law and it was something to be proud of, truly. But Paul is making it clear here that all mankind has been given an innate understanding of God's righteous requirements.

We call that good and bad, right? And it has come to us in the form of a conscience and it is, in essence, a moral compass that is given to all mankind. Well, you might say, well, if God has given us a moral compass and that is the essence of the law, then why even give us the law? Well, there's a lot of other reasons for that. But one of the reasons that we needed also the law was because the conscience can be corrupted.

It's not a perfect thing. It was given to us as a moral compass, but that compass can be broken. And Paul actually refers to this when he wrote to Timothy. Let me put this on the screen for you. From 1 Timothy 4, it says, the Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.

Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, look at this, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. You'll notice I read that out of the 84 revision of the NIV. I like the wording there because that whole idea of being seared with a hot iron is very reminiscent of what happens when you brand an animal. You know, for those of you, I don't know how many of you were raised on a farm and were involved in branding, or maybe you saw it on your favorite Western or something like that. But essentially, you know, people would brand their animals because they didn't have fences and they needed to know whose animal belonged to who.

And so they'd put their brand, their mark on the animal. And of course they would heat up an iron in the fire until it was glowing. And then they'd press it against usually the hind quarters of the animal. And what it would do is it would create this scab. And once it scabbed over, of course, you know, all the hair is gone.

It's been burned away, but the scab remains. And that's what Paul is referring to when he talks about people whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. It literally means that they've scabbed over to the point where they no longer sense the Holy Spirit. They have no sensitivity any longer to respond to what would be an innate moral compass of right and wrong. It's gone, it's been corrupted, right?

So we needed the law. We needed the law to establish that righteousness, you know. And so as we get to verse 17, you'll notice Paul begins by saying, but if you call yourself a Jew, now I want you to stop there for a moment because this is where Paul begins to address the religionist and the religionists of Paul's day was the group that he was once a part of, the Pharisaical Jewish sect that trusted in their religion. Now today, there are other people who are religionists without being either Jews or Pharisees. So we still have religious people today, but these are people who know God's word, right?

Again, I told you the moralist might know God or he might say even he believes in God, but he really doesn't know God's word. He just knows and understand the basics of right and wrong. Now we're talking about the religionist. This person, they know God's word and the Jews had received the law. They heard from God himself.

They knew what his righteous requirements were and so forth. But as I said before, I don't believe that these words that Paul is going to say here as he addresses religious people. that they're limited to the Jews. He's going to talk to the Jews. But I don't believe they're limited to them.

Because by using the word religious, we're talking about people essentially who are relying on their religious practice. Okay? So that's what we mean when we talk about religious people. These aren't necessarily people who are relying on God's mercy, God's grace, God's love, God's patience. No.

They are relying on their religious observance. In other words, what they do in a religious context is what makes them feel close to God and approved by God. And that's an important distinction. So for the religionists, just keep this in mind. It's all about performance.

Okay? Now, I meet a lot of Christians who are still have a bent toward performance in their relationship with God. And that's something we have to get over. Or it's going to kill you. Because God doesn't want a performance-oriented relationship with you.

He wants a personal love relationship with you, a relationship of the heart. And yet there's a lot of Christians who have come out of a performance-based upbringing, you know, where at my home, boy, I tell you, you had to tow the line, or you got in trouble. You get up every morning, you got to do this, you got to do that. And if you do all that, my parents would smile at you. And if you didn't do all these things, you'd be in trouble.

And so I just, you know, you talk to people like that, who've come from that background, and they've learned in their lives how to be performance-oriented, and how to please. And they go into the workplace with that same mentality, which probably works well there, but they come into their Christian relationship with that same mentality. And they try to please God by performing and doing good. And they truly believe that when they're doing good, that's why good things happen. And when things go bad, the first thing a performance-oriented Christian says is, what did I do?

What did I do? And they'll come to a pastor like me and say, Pastor Paul, what did I do? Because you see, to them, it's all about performance. Right? So this is the person we're talking about.

And this is the religionist. Their relationship with God is based on their religious observance. I read my Bible every day. I pray every day. I go to church every week.

You know? I go to Bible study. I do these things. Verse 17. But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God, and you know His will, and you approve what is excellent because you're instructed from the law, and if you are absolutely sure that you yourself, and you can hear some sarcasm here, are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children.

You see how religious people tend to kind of look down at other people? You need me to teach you. Having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth, verse 21, he goes on to say, you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? And while you're preaching against all these things, like stealing, do you steal? You preach about committing adultery.

What about you? And on and on and on. He mentions also, you know, robbing temples. Weird. So the bottom line here is that even people who are religious are still lawbreakers.

That's the bottom line. It's not a deep conclusion that Paul's trying to, you know, bring up. He's basically saying, you who love the law or love your religious observance and think that you're good by that, do you not also understand that you are a lawbreaker? And Paul gives this charge in verse 23. You who boast in the law dishonor God by actually breaking the law.

And of course, this is going to upset people. It upset people when, you know, Paul the apostle was around. He got into lots of trouble by telling people that. Verse 24, for as it is written, the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you. You see, you've got to understand something about the law.

And again, this was the way the Jew, this was his religious observance. The law was never meant to save anybody. You know, I run into Christians from time to time who will ask the question, how were people saved under the Old Covenant? We know that today we're saved by putting our faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness. He hadn't died on the cross yet.

How were people back in the Old Testament time saved? The natural response by people is say, well, God gave them the law. They had to keep the law. That's 100% wrong. God never once promised in the Old Testament, keep the law, you'll go to heaven.

Never one time. The promises that were related to keeping the law were all physical promises. There weren't any spiritual promises really in there. The promises related to keeping the law was, I'll give you the land. I'll bless you in the land.

Your enemies won't be able to stand against you. Your kids will be cool. Your crops will be good. The weather will be great. You know, these were some of the promises that went along.

You won't have the sicknesses that you did or you dealt with in Egypt. You know, you won't be slaves any longer. You're going to be in charge of your own life and da-da-da-da. Never once did God say, oh, and by the way, if you keep the law, you'll go to heaven. That's what the Jews came to that conclusion all on their own.

Lord, what good thing must I do to have eternal life? You know, what was the law meant to do? It was meant to show us how bad we really are. That's why God gave the law. It's a measuring stick.

You know, we took a couple of our grandkids over to Shields to go on the Ferris wheel, and I could tell, you know, that when they saw that yardstick thing they've got there, you've got to be this tall, you know, to go on the Ferris. A couple of my grandkids were looking at that like, oh, I don't know. They didn't know if they measured up, you know, and they were greatly relieved to find out that they were tall enough to actually go on the Ferris wheel, and they were delighted. But that's the picture of the law. It simply tells you how far you fall short, and that's what it was meant to do.

It was meant to show us how bad sin really is, okay? The law could never save anybody. That's why I got to tell you, and you might disagree with me on this, and that's fine. There's a lot of people fighting to get the Ten Commandments in our schools, and that's fine. You know, I come from a day and age when my third grade teacher had a Bible on her desk, and nobody, you know, cared about it, and I would love to see the faith of the Lord back in schools.

Probably not going to happen, but, you know, I'd love to see it. But, you know, when people are fighting, you know, we want the Ten Commandments. We want to get the Ten. Listen, the Ten Commandments are wonderful, but they kill people. Do you understand that?

Paul actually talks about that. He talks about the fact that when I heard the law, sin sprang to life, and I died. I died when I heard the law. And why? Because he realized, I'm under the curse.

I can't do this. Nobody can. Nobody can keep this perfectly. And so sin sprang to life, he says, you know, when I heard the law. So, you know, it kind of makes me, it's like, okay, if you want to have the Ten Commandments here or there or on your yard or whatever, fine, but don't stop.

That's just the bad news. The Ten Commandments is the bad news, you guys, and if all we give people is the bad news without giving them the good news, we've got a problem on our hands, right? Because the bad news is only half the story. You're condemned. You're going to hell.

But guess what? Jesus died to save you from your sin. That's the good news. We're going to get to that here in Romans. But, you know, so we've got to give people the good news, too, you know?

Well, the Jews came to the place where they actually thought they could keep the law, but Jesus had to debunk that during his public ministry. Let me show you a couple examples on the screen from Matthew chapter 5. Look at this. You've heard that it was said to those of old, you shall not murder, and whoever murders will be liable to judgment. But I say to you that everyone who's angry with his brother will be liable to judgment.

Whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council, and whoever says, you fool, will be liable to the hell of fire. Doesn't that make you shudder? And then look at a little bit farther on, Matthew 5.27. You've heard that it was said you shall not commit adultery, but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. And I think you can see what Jesus was doing in those passages.

The Jews had interpreted... law from a very strict physical standpoint, meaning if I've never taken a life or I've never physically gotten in bed with a woman other than my wife, I'm good. I kept the law, right? But Jesus goes on to say, it's deeper than that. Because you see, He says, you can murder somebody in your heart.

You can commit adultery with another woman in your heart. Oh, we just raised the standard. You see what happened here? The law just got more severe. Is any of us, is there, are there any of us who can keep that level of righteousness that Jesus is establishing here?

There's not one. And that's the point. So again, what we're emphasizing here, and I'm sorry if it's if it's just bumming you out, but this is the bad news for the religious person who's relying on their religious performance. And that's what the Jews did. And you know, for the Jews, it was all, it's funny, what you rely on from a religious perspective changes with time.

With the Jews, it was circumcision. And that's why Paul goes on to talk about it here later in these verses. Because you'll remember that circumcision was actually the covenant sign between God and the Jews. It was given through Abraham to the Jewish people. And they believed with all their hearts that being circumcised guaranteed them acceptance with God.

And that's why the Jews would literally refer to themselves as the circumcision. We're the circumcision. Cool, huh? Yeah. That means we're in.

We're in. You're not, we are. Because we have the covenant sign, right? And of course, they referred to that covenant sign as being children of Abraham. Because Abraham received it, we have, we're children of Abraham.

Remember what John the Baptist was saying to the people when he came to prepare their hearts to receive their Messiah? Let me put it on the screen. Luke chapter 3. This is a great passage. Here's John.

He says, And do not begin to say to yourselves, Oh, we have Abraham as our father. For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now, look what John is saying to them. These are religious people. The axe is laid to the root of the trees.

And every tree, therefore, that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Do you see what John is, and how controversial what John is saying? He's telling religious people, your religion isn't enough. You rely on your religious performance that you are circumcised. Big deal.

He says, God can raise up children of Abraham from these rocks over here. He says, let me tell you what's really going on. Judgment is coming. That's what he means when he says the axe is at the root of the tree. God's about to lop it off.

Right? Well, this is a horrible thing for Jews to hear. All their lives they've been raised believing the circumcision was the key that unlocked the door. And John comes along and he says, it's no key at all. You're just as lost as the pagan, you know?

Now, the last thing Paul does in this chapter while addressing the religionist is he exposes, again, the insignificance of their religious performance. And because, you know, like I said before, religious people lean on their religious observance. And he's not going to talk about all religious observance. He's just going to talk about the Jews. But you're going to have to think yourself, you know, what else do people rely upon today?

What is a religious observance that people rely on today? But here's how Paul explained it to the religious Jews. Verse 25, for circumcision, he says, is indeed a value if you obey the law. In other words, you want to be religious? Fine.

But your religion means nothing if you violate the law. Do you get that? Your religion means nothing if you violate the law. That's what he's telling them. And that's why he says, if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision.

Now that's a cumbersome sentence. But he's saying, if you break the law, your religion becomes unreligion. It becomes nothing. That's the point, right? In the last few verses, Paul's going to tell the religionist here what he's really looking for.

Here's how he puts it, verse 26, so if a man who is circumcised keeps the precepts of the law, which again, we know is not totally possible, will not his...okay, if a man who is uncircumcised, I think, I hope I got read that right, keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? And this is really just a way of saying, if a man who is not religious walks in righteousness before God, won't his actions be regarded as true religion? Yeah, they would. Verse 27, then he who is physically uncircumcised, but keeps the law, will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision, but break the law. Again, this is the principle.

But let me put this verse into context. Paul's saying, the man who has never known any sort of religious observance, never been baptized, we could even throw that in there today, that's a religious observance some people are relying on. Some people are relying on confessing their sins to a priest, that's

religious observance. Some people are relying on the very first time they took the Eucharist communion, that's a religious observance. Those things were never meant to save you, but there are people who are relying on those things.

Okay? So he's saying, the man who has never known any sort of religious observance, but who walks with God in integrity of heart, is going to end up condemning all of you who have lived a life of empty religious observance. But you cared nothing about walking rightly with God. Verse 28, for one who is a Jew, or excuse me, for no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, and that's what the Jews believed, nor is circumcision outward and physical. They thought it was, they thought it was purely physical.

But a Jew is one inwardly and circumcision is a matter of the heart by the Spirit, not by the letter. And it says, his praise is not from man, but from God. And this, oh, this had to be so hard for the Jews to hear. Now, I don't know if there were any Jews that were receiving this letter in Rome when Paul wrote this. They may have been all Gentiles, doesn't really matter.

Paul's, excuse me, laying down these principles that are just as important whether you're a Jew or a Gentile. But he's basically saying this, and we'll bring this more to a more modern religious observance sort of a thing. He's saying, in essence, that what God is looking for is a religion of the heart. We talk a lot about religion, and we use very negative connotations to do that. But ultimately, you know, the word religion is not a dirty word.

James even talks about true religion. There is such a thing that's good and right, but it's not outward. It's not connected to your observance. It's a heart matter. And you know, God tried to say this to the people of Israel, even in the Old Testament.

He tried to tell them that circumcision was not merely outward. It was a picture of what he wanted to take place inwardly, because what is circumcision outwardly? It's a cutting away of the flesh. What is it to be inward? A cutting away of the flesh.

But in this case, the sinful nature. And I want to show you this, and we'll end with this from Jeremiah chapter 9. Look at this. Here's God explaining this under the Old Covenant. He says, Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will punish all those who are circumcised merely in the flesh or only in the flesh, Egypt, Judah, Edom, sons of Ammon, Moab.

All these nations are uncircumcised. And look at this. And all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in heart. And some of the Jews might read that and go, I didn't know you wanted us to be circumcised. I only didn't know about that.

All I knew about was the other thing. The thing they did on the eighth day of a male child's life. I didn't know it was a hard thing. It's a hard thing. What's the bottom line here, guys?

God wants your heart. He doesn't want your godlessness. He doesn't want your fake morality. He doesn't want your religion. He's not interested.

He wants your heart. He wants you, the essence of who you are, to know Him, to love Him, to follow Him. And by the way, on the day that He saved you, He knew you weren't going to be able to follow Him perfectly and He saved you anyway. I get so many notes from people who are going through a bad time with sin, and they will inevitably ask the question, Pastor Paul, do you think I was ever truly saved? And I tell them, I write them back, and I tell them how dangerous of a question that is.

When you begin to question your salvation based on your performance, because understand this, your salvation is not based on your performance. It's based on Jesus's performance, and He performed. He did everything right. He kept the law perfectly, and because He was not under the curse of sin, He was eligible to stand in for you. You see, I couldn't do that.

If I said to the Lord, Lord, I'd like to die for my friend over here, the Lord would say, well, sorry, Paul, you can't do that. Well, why? Because you're disqualified. Because if you're going to pay for anybody's sins, it's got to be your own, right? Well, Jesus didn't sin.

He said that to the people once. At one point, He said, who here can condemn me or convict me of sin? Good grief, even the thief on the cross looked at Jesus and said, He's done nothing wrong. And because of that, He was able to hang on that cross for you and me. He was eligible to stand in for you and me.

Praise God. Amen. What a wonderful thing. But listen to me and hear me clearly. When you mess up, and we all mess up, and I'm not saying that to give you a license to mess up, but I'm saying it's going to happen.

That does not, that is not a commentary or a barometer on which you should judge the efficacy of your salvation or what Jesus did for you on the cross. When people say to me, sometimes I wonder if I'm even saved. I say, well, how come? Well, then they start telling me about what they did. And I'm going, what does that have to do with it?

What does how you've lived have to do with what Jesus did for you and your faith in Him? Because that's how we're saved, you guys, by putting our faith in the finished work of Jesus on the cross. And may I just remind you, it is finished. Done. That's what Jesus said.

I'm not saying that. He said it. He declared it victoriously from the cross. It is finished. It's done.

It's over. And that, what that means is paid in full. Paid in full. And that means there's nothing left to pay. So stop thinking you have to perform to please God or to make him love you or be close to him.

He wants to, he knows you're a mess up. He knows I'm a mess up. He sees all our warts and wrinkles and he loves us because he's chosen to love us. And what he sees now in you is the righteousness of his son. Because you and I have been robed in that righteousness.

Jesus literally put that robe over your shoulders. And now when the father looks at you and me, he sees his son Jesus. He says, that one's mine. That one right there. Sins are wiped out.

That one's mine. I love that one. And no wrath will come to that one. Because that person's wrath, the wrath that they deserved, has already been consumed by my son when he suffered on the cross. That wrath is over for that person.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Amen?