

PARADISE LOST "HEART OF THE MATTER" ROMANS 2:17-29

We all have baggage, most of which, in airport jargon, we "pack ourselves." Of course, some struggle more with their "carry on" bags than others. I'm always amazed by what people bring on board a plane. One personal item and one bag doesn't sound like much until you see what people think will go in the overhead bins and under their seats—especially on international flights. Many can barely make it to their seats pulling a large roller board with one hand, wearing an overstuffed backpack, hanging on to a purse and sometimes a shopping bag in the other hand. I can't tell you the number of times I've been accidentally hit in the face either by bags or by backpacks as people claw their way through the plane. I guess they don't trust the airline with their luggage.

We are all encumbered by sin as we make our way through life. Again, some struggle more with their shortcomings than others. I've heard it said, "We all mess up. In fact, most of us are just one stupid decision away from destroying our lives." And unfortunately, religion doesn't seem to help that much. Often it simply adds to the burdens we bear—certainly legalistic religion does. What's more, that kind of religion fosters pride, as well as hypocrisy, and leads to a false sense of security, while at the same time bringing no salvation. The religion of the Pharisees was like that, and Jesus warned against it. "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make

It was not the possession of the Law that counted, but the practice of the Law.

— Warren W. Wiersbe

him twice as much a son of hell as you are" (Mt 23:15). You see, no one is forgiven and set right with God by religious observances. Paul makes this clear. He writes: "It was not because of any good deeds that we ourselves had done, but because of his own mercy that he saved us, through the Holy Spirit, who gives us new birth and new life by washing us" (Tit 3:5 GNT), and "For it is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith. It is not the result of your own efforts, but God's gift, so that no one can boast about it" (Eph 2:8-9 GNT).

This Week's Core Competency

Humanity – I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Being religious isn't bad, but it isn't necessarily good either. In fact, it may prove detrimental on the day God judges all people according to their works (Ro 2:6-16; cf., Re 22:12). We are saved by faith, not by works, but works seen through the eyes of the one who "judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ" (Ro 2:16) do serve as an evidence of faith. On the day when God's righteous judgment is revealed (v. 5), the external trappings of religion alone will not guarantee a positive verdict. The Jews of Jesus' day boasted in their circumcision, which identified them as God's covenant people, and their possession of the law, which they believed had to be obeyed *sincerely* but not *perfectly*, believing these would keep them out of hell. "Circumcision was to Jewry what baptism is to those who maintain baptismal regeneration. In dividing men into two classes, circumcised and uncircumcised, the Jews were in effect indicating those who were saved and those who were not" (Everett F. Harrison, "Romans," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 10:34).

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In Romans, Paul corrects their wrongheaded views by arguing that obedience to the law rather than merely hearing the law, and inward circumcision of the heart rather than merely outward physical circumcision are what matter. "Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised . . . A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. 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" (Ro 2:25, 28-29).

One commentator writes: "The Jew boasted in the Law. He was different from his pagan neighbors who worshiped idols! But Paul made it clear that it was not the *possession* of the Law that counted, but the *practice* of the Law . . . Circumcision was the great mark of the covenant, and it had its beginning with Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation (Gen. 17). To the Jews, the Gentiles were 'uncircumcised dogs.' The tragedy is that the Jews depended on this physical mark instead of the spiritual reality it represented (Deut. 10:16; Jer. 9:26; Ezek. 44:9). A true Jew is one who has had an inward spiritual experience in the heart, and not merely an outward physical operation. People today make this same mistake with reference to baptism or the Lord's Supper, or even church membership" (Warren W. Wiersbe, "Romans," in *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 1:520-21).

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Romans 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.

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Underline "you" in vv. 17-24.
- * Highlight "Jew" in vv. 17, 28-29.
- * Box "if" introducing *conditional* clauses in vv. 17-20.
- * Box "then" introducing *consequence* clauses in vv. 21-23.
- * Bracket the *rhetorical* questions in vv. 21-23.
- * Circle "rob temples" in v. 22.
- * Circle "blasphemed" in v. 24.
- * Box "but" indicating *contrast* in vv. 25.
- * Circle "circumcision" in vv. 25-27.
- * Box "so then" indicating *result* in v. 26.
- * Double underline "only" in v. 28 and "merely" in v. 29.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Paul uses the same literary or rhetorical style in verses 17-24 that he uses in verses 1-5. Describe it.
2. Are the *conditional* clauses in verses 17-19 (e.g., "if you call yourself a Jew") assumed to be true to fact or contrary to fact? Explain.
3. Prove that Paul is addressing Jews in verses 17-29.
4. What do the *rhetorical* questions in verses 21-23 sound like to you?
5. Why is God's name blasphemed among the Gentiles?
6. Might the same thing be true of Christians that Paul says is true of Jews? Explain.
7. Describe the relationship between keeping the law and circumcision (cf., vv. 12-13).
8. The man who is only outwardly a Jew merely by circumcision is not a true Jew (v. 28). What more is required?
9. **Discussion:** Talk about what "circumcision of the heart by the Spirit" refers to.

day 3 **EXAMINE** – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

Romans 1:18-32 indicts *indecent* people, namely those who choose to worship something other than the Creator, whom he gives over "to sexual impurity" (v. 24), "to shameful lusts" (v. 26), and "to a depraved mind to do what ought not to be done" (v. 28). Chapter two picks up where chapter one leaves off by indicting another group that has "no excuse," namely *decent* people who incriminate themselves by condemning in others what they condone in themselves (vv. 1-16). The chapter then closes with an indictment of Jews, who "rely on the law" (v. 17) but hypocritically do the very things they teach others not to do (vv. 18-24), and who "boast about [their] relationship to God" (v. 17) but mistakenly think outward circumcision, apart from obedience to the law, makes them true Jews (vv. 25-29).

In 2:1-16 Paul argues that the righteous judgment of God is first, based on what people do (v. 6) and is second, impartial, "for God does not show favoritism" (v. 11). According to one commentator, "Paul's main point in 2:1-16 is that, because Jews will be assessed by God in the judgment on the same basis as Gentiles (works, doing 'the law'), they cannot assume, any more than Gentiles, that they will escape God's wrath (2:4). Paul is, however, well aware that his argument ignores a crucial matter: the Jew's claim to possess a status by virtue of the covenant that puts them in a position entirely different from that of the Gentiles. In vv. 17-29, Paul takes up this matter . . . In two paragraphs with roughly parallel arguments (vv. 17-24, 25-29), Paul takes up those two things that, more than any others, pointed to the Jews' special status: the law and circumcision. In both paragraphs, without dismissing them as worthless, Paul argues that neither knowledge of the law nor physical circumcision has value unless the law is obeyed. Again, it is what is actually done that is critical in determining every person's destiny—for the Jew as well as for the Gentile (2:13)" (Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, 157-58).

Paul resumes the use of diatribe (cf., vv. 1-5), and develops the point of verses 17-24 using a series of *conditional* sentences followed by a series of *rhetorical* questions. The first conditional clause, "if you call yourself a Jew" (v. 17), is assumed to be true and consequently, means, "you call yourself a

Jew." The rest of the conditional clauses are likewise "real" conditions and consequently, mean: "you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God" (v. 17); "you know his will and approve of what is superior" (v. 18); "you are convinced that you are a guide to the blind" (v. 19), and so on. In these verses, Paul claims for the Jews nothing more than what the Jews of his day claimed for themselves. Every item on his list in verses 17-20 is found in Jewish literature of the time. The first rhetorical question, "do you not teach yourself?" (v. 21), assumes an affirmative answer and consequently, means, "you do not teach yourself." The rest of the rhetorical questions likewise assume affirmative answers and consequently, mean: "you do steal" (v. 21); "you commit adultery" (v. 22); "you do rob temples" (v. 22), and so on. The rhetorical questions in these verses reveal the *inconsistency* and *hypocrisy* of Jews in Paul's day, who made lofty claims for themselves (vv. 17-20) but failed to practice what they preached. Thus, they deserved the prophet's condemnation: "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you" (Isa 52:5).

In verses 25-29, Paul comments on the value of circumcision. In verses 25-27, he argues that the value of circumcision is contingent on observing the law. "If you break the law," Paul says, "you have become as though you had not been circumcised" (v. 25). And "if those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements," Paul says, "will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised?" (v. 26). The apostle's words echo the points of the previous section: God's righteous judgment is based on what people do, and God does not show favoritism. In verses 28-29, he argues that a *true* Jew is one both *outwardly* and *inwardly*. A *true* Jew is one whose circumcision is both physical and spiritual. "A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. 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" (v. 29). In other words, "a real Jew is one who has had his heart transformed or circumcised by the Spirit, which can operate inwardly in a way that the written code cannot" (Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to*

the Romans, 91). The Jews of Paul's day relied on the law but didn't observe it, and they boasted about their relationship to God but mistakenly

thought physical circumcision alone made them true Jews.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

The Message of the Passage

Jews are also without excuse because they "rely on the law" but don't observe it and "boast about their relationship to God" but mistakenly think outward circumcision alone makes them true Jews.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on the message of Romans 1:1-7 and your response to it.

What kinds of things do religious people other than Jews rely on?

What did you rely on before you became a Christian?

How can you raise the truth of this passage when you share the gospel?

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

vv. 17-24 **you** Paul resumes his use of diatribe, the rhetorical device employing direct address of an imaginary listener, that he uses in verses 1-5. To it he adds a series of rhetorical questions to make his point. "The author of the diatribe would often criticize his 'opponent' for not 'practicing what he preached'" (Moo, 157)—something he does here regarding the Jew.

vv. 17, 28-29 **Jew** The "decent" people in view in verses 1-16 are Gentiles and Jews in general; in verses 17-29, Paul focuses specifically on Jews. "The name 'Jew,' which originally referred to a person from the region occupied by the descendants of Judah, was applied to Israelite people generally after the exile, when the territory occupied by the Jews encompassed not much more than the original Judah. By Paul's day, 'Jew' had become a common designation of anyone who belonged to the people of Israel. It suggests the special status enjoyed by the people of Israel, in distinction from all other peoples (cf. 1:16; 2:9,11). 'To be named a Jew,' then, refers to the religious status shared by anyone who belonged to the covenant people" (Moo, 159). "In addressing a single Jew Paul has in mind no particular Jew, of course, but the typical Jew (*TDNT* 3:380-81), that is, the Jew per se, conscious of his Jewishness, of his distinctiveness from the nations (see on 3:1)" (Dunn, 109).

vv. 17-20 **if . . . then** The clause beginning with "if" in a conditional sentence is called the *protasis*. Paul strings a number of these conditional clauses together to form one compound protasis in verses 17-20. The clause beginning with "then" in a conditional sentence is called the *apodosis*. Paul strings a number of these consequence clauses together in the form of rhetorical questions to form one compound apodosis in verses 21-24. In a nutshell, "vv. 21-24 expose the failure of the Jew to live up to the privileges that Paul enumerates in vv. 17-20 . . . They expose the Jew who has made the lofty claims of vv. 17-20 as inconsistent and hypocritical, as failing 'to practice what he preaches" (159, 163).

v. 22 **rob temples** Cf., Ac 19:37; large amounts of wealth were often stored in pagan temples. "Paul could conceivably have had Mal 1:14 in mind; and we can document at least one case of a Jew in Rome misappropriating funds and gifts intended for the temple—a scandal that resulted in the expulsion of the Jewish community from Rome in A.D. 19 (Josephus, *Ant.* 18.81-84). But in context the thought more probably has pagan temple and idols in view—the danger being that of actual plunder (as in Josephus, *Ant.* 4.207), or of use of items taken from idol shrines" (James D. G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 38a, *Romans 1-8*, 114-15; cf., F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, TNTC, 93). "Would a religious Jew actually visit a pagan temple? The truth of the matter is that Jews carried on such syncretistic practices in several major cities of the empire. An especially high-status cultured Jew might well have socialized with pagans, perhaps even in temples on occasion" (Witherington, 90).

v. 24 **blasphemed** Cf., Isa. 52:5. "The sad plight of the Jews in exile caused the Gentiles to speak lightly of their God, imagining that He was unable to help His people. Now it is not His people's misfortune, but their misconduct, that causes the Gentile to conclude that the God of such people cannot be of much account" (Bruce, 93).

v. 25-27 **circumcision** Cf., Ge 17:10-14. "Israel's neighbours for the most part practiced circumcision (the Philistines were a notorious exception); but the circumcision of Israel's neighbours was not a sign of God's covenant, as Israelite circumcision was intended to be" (94). The importance of circumcision in Judaism cannot be overestimated. "Circumcision was fundamental to the typical Jew's self-understanding, the mark of his religious distinctiveness, the badge of national privilege, the seal of God's covenant favor to Israel his chosen people. The confidence that circumcision secured the Israelite's salvation, which we find coming to expression within the sayings of later rabbinic Judaism, is the confidence of Paul's interlocutor, the same presumption of God's favor which long before had resulted in the exile (v 24). This is the false confidence Paul now attacks head-on: circumcision in and of itself makes no difference; circumcision will not be sufficient to secure the salvation of anyone who is a transgressor of the law" (Dunn, 125-26).

v. 28-29 **only . . . merely** Paul is not teaching that every Gentile Christian is a true Jew but that every Jew, i.e., ethnic descendant of Abraham through Jacob, is not a true Jew. "A true Jew is one who has had an inward spiritual experience in the heart, and not merely an outward physical operation. People today make this same mistake with reference to baptism or the Lord's Supper, or even church membership" (Warren W. Wiersbe, "Romans," in *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 1:521). "He is not teaching that every Gentile Christian is a spiritual Jew. Rather, he is teaching that every Jew is not a full Jew. A completed Jew is one who has had both circumcisions, the circumcision of the flesh, which is outward in obedience to the Abrahamic covenant, and an inward circumcision of the heart . . . A true Jew—a full Jew—is a Jew who is a Jew both outwardly and inwardly" (Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, "Israel and the Church," in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, 128-29).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

As parents, we all have had (or will have) moments when our children perform the task we've asked them to do but by the end of, we are almost sorry they did. Yes, they will do the dishes as requested. However, there is serious eye-rolling and audible sighing as they do so. You are lucky the dishes aren't broken by the way they were placed in the cabinet and the door slammed shut. At the end, they believe they have done the right thing because the task is complete-however, they missed the point. While their actions were obedient, their hearts were not. The Jews in our text today thought they were right too. They obeyed the law and were circumcised but their hearts were not right with God. As parents, we don't want to focus solely on our kids' behavior, we want to focus on the condition of their hearts. Behavior modification is important and may provide some quick change, but lasting change happens in the heart. The heart is where we make decisions about how we are going to respond to situations. "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life" (Pr 4:23). We can help our kids' hearts be knitted to Jesus by praying for them, reading the Bible with them, living rightly before them, and bringing them to church. With some effort they will obey not only with their actions but whole-heartedly as well!

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Romans 2:17-29

1. Who is Paul talking to in the text?
2. What does he say is happening because of their actions? (v. 24)
3. What does "blasphemed" mean?

What Do You Think

"Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1Sa 16:7). What do you think this means?

What R U Going To Do

Pay attention to the way you obey your parents this week. Do you do so cheerfully and respectfully? Do you grumble or complain? Write down a time you obeyed rightly from your heart.

Core Comp

Humanity - I believe God loves everyone and we all need Jesus as Savior.

Memory Verse

Romans 2:8 - *But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be anger and wrath.*

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse _____, completed *Scrolls* _____, brought Bible _____, brought a friend _____.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.

Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity 2 Corinthians 13:14

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace Ephesians 2:8-9

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible 2 Timothy 3:16-17

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God Psalm 121:1-2

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ John 1:12

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church Ephesians 4:15-16

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity John 3:16

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion Psalm 82:3-4

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity John 14:1-4

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship 1 Timothy 6:17-19

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship Psalm 95:1-7

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer Psalm 66:16-20

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study Hebrews 4:12

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness Matthew 6:33

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts Romans 12:4-6

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community Acts 2:44-47

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time Colossians 3:17

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith Ephesians

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life Romans 12:1

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy John 15:11

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace Philippians 4:6-7

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness Proverbs 3:3-4

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control Titus 2:11-13

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility Philippians 2:3, 4

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love 1 John 4:10-12

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience Proverbs 14:29

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness 1 Thess. 5:15

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness Philippians 4:5

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope Hebrews 6:19-20

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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Wendy Hollabaugh (B.S.W. University of Texas at Arlington) is the Children's Minister at Pantego Bible Church. Wendy has over ten years of experience in Children's Ministry. She has a passion for leading families to connect with God and each other. She enjoys creating compelling environments where kids fall in love with God and His Truth. Wendy and her husband, Greg, are also involved in their own personal youth ministry as they are training their three teenagers, Hannah, Aaron and Noah.



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