

Romans 2:17-29 and 3:1-20

In Romans chapters one and two, God makes His case against the Gentiles.

Both the immoral and the relatively moral inhabitants of His earth had been tried and found wanting.

Certainly, the immoral Gentile could expect God's condemnation.

However, even those whom we might classify as good citizens fared no better.

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In today's lesson, God's Chosen People are before us, and once again, we will be looking at them through God's eyes.

And by that I mean we will be looking at the innermost motives of their hearts.

Romans 2:17 **"Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy**

boast of God,

¹⁸ And knowest his will, and
approvest the things that are more
excellent, being instructed out of the
law;

¹⁹ And art confident that thou
thyself art a guide of the blind, a
light of them which are in darkness,

²⁰ An instructor of the foolish, a
teacher of babes, which hast the form
of knowledge and of the truth in the
law."

Here we see man with all the advantages.

Unlike the other nations, Israel had

personally received God's written Word.

They knew what His requirements were, and

they knew when they had missed the
mark.

Yes, throughout their national history, God had sent His prophets to instruct and rebuke them.

And their national heritage was second to none, including such men as Abraham Isaac and Jacob.

Yes, they had **"the form of knowledge and of the truth ---"** in their heads, but their hearts were not inclined towards God.

The whole nation, from the highest to the lowest, simply trusted in their national heritage, and their largely man-made religion, a religion that replaced righteousness with hypocrisy.

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V 21 **"Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that**

preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?"

What was God driving at here?

Certainly there are thieves and robbers in every culture, but surely the whole nation didn't steal!

Well, no, not from each other.

But they did steal from God.

In fact, it had been a point of contention way back in Malachi's day.

We can read about it in Malachi 3:7-10 **"Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?"**

First of all, God made a general statement -
--- **"ye are gone away from mine
ordinances."**

These words should have triggered a time of
self examination, but instead, they
went on the defensive --- **"Wherein
shall we return?"**

It was then that God gave them a specific
example of their disobedience.

V 8 **"Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed
me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed
thee? In tithes and offerings.**

**9: Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye
have robbed me, even this whole nation.**

**10: Bring ye all the tithes into the
storehouse, that there may be meat in
mine house, and prove me now herewith,
saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not
open you the windows of heaven, and**

pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

In Noah's day, God had opened the windows of heaven and poured out judgment.

However, this time, He was willing to overwhelm them with His blessing, if they would only obey His commandmentd.

No, we cannot outgive God.

Unlike Israel, God has never promised the Christian material wealth, but He still blesses the liberal heart.

His words are as relevant today as they were in Malachi's --- **prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."**

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Certainly God was referring to all Israel
when He said "**dost thou steal?**"

In fact, all of the charges laid out in
Romans 2:21-27 apply to the whole
nation.

However, from this point on in our lesson, I
would like to confine my remarks to the
sins of their religious leaders.

Why?

Because they were the custodians of God's
Word.

Unlike today, there were no printing presses
that could turn out copies of the Holy
Scriptures for each household.

Consequently, the average Israelite had to
look to their leaders for their
religious education.

However, instead of seeing this as a holy trust, the scribes and Pharisees used their privileged position to feather their own nests.

Yes, like many who have gone before them, they were false shepherds.

Ezekiel 34:3 **"Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock."**

Jesus summed it up very well when He said, **"ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in."**

Yes, they only had a **"form of knowledge and of the truth in the law."**

And, their chief concern was for their image, rather than any real godliness.

Let me give you an example of their
preoccupation with outward show.

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When Israel was a relatively young nation,
God had instructed them to wear a blue
border on their garments.

We see that in Numbers 15:38-39 **"Speak unto
the children of Israel, and bid them
that they make them fringes in the
borders of their garments throughout
their generations, and that they put
upon the fringe of the borders a
ribband of blue:**

³⁹ **And it shall be unto you for a
fringe, that ye may look upon it, and
remember all the commandments of the
LORD, and do them; ---"**

This special border was a visual aid to remind them that they were a heavenly people.

Do you know what the scribes and Pharisees did?

You guessed it. They made their borders wider than everyone else's.

It was their visual aid to impress the general population with their superior holiness.

What it really displayed was their preoccupation with the outward appearance.

It was a characteristic that flowed through their entire nature, and it was a characteristic that Jesus pointed out to the rest of people.

Matthew 23:5-7 "--- **all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad**

their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,

6: And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues,

7: And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi."

Yes, they were very concerned with the impression they made on the people, but none of it impressed God.

He gives us the bottom line in Romans 2:28-29, **"For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:**

29: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in

**the letter; whose praise is not of men,
but of God."**

"For he is not a Jew, which is one

outwardly." What a shocker that was!

All this outward show hadn't amounted to a
hill of beans.

It was the heart that really mattered to
God, and it was the heart that He was
describing in Romans 2:21 when He said,
**"Thou therefore which teachest another,
teachest thou not thyself? thou that
preachest a man should not steal, dost
thou steal?"**

Certainly, the scribes and Pharisees weren't
breaking into people's houses at night
and carrying off their possessions.
No, nothing as illegal as that.

But they were adding to God's laws, and they were bending His Word to their own advantage.

And Jesus brought that out into the open in Mark 7:9-13 "And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.

10 For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death:

11 But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free.

12 And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother;

13 **Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye."**

In so many words, they were saying, *If you don't want to take care of your parents, you can give the money to the temple, and have a clear conscience about it.*

They called it a tradition, but God called it stealing.

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Back to Romans 2:22 **"Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery?"**

Here again we must remember that God is looking at the heart.

And if you want to see adultery the way God sees it, you should listen to Jesus'

words, in Matthew 5:28 ---"**whosoever
looketh on a woman to lust after her
hath committed adultery with her
already in his heart.**"

Of course, that's not to say they weren't
guilty of the actual act, for the one
often leads to the other.

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But what about the second question in V 22 "
---**dost thou commit sacrilege?**"

The dictionary defines sacrilege as the act
of violating or profaning anything
sacred.

Surely the scribes and Pharisees wouldn't do
that!

After all, they were almost fanatical in
that area, to the point of making up a
lot of their own rules.

Nevertheless, they were committing
sacrilege.

And Jesus gives us a good example of that in
Mark 7:6-9, "--- Well hath Esaias
prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is
written, This people honoureth me with
their lips, but their heart is far from
me.

7: Howbeit in vain do they worship me,
teaching for doctrines the commandments
of men.

8: For laying aside the commandment of
God, ye hold the tradition of men, as
the washing of pots and cups: and many
other such like things ye do.

9: And he said unto them, Full well ye
reject the commandment of God, that ye
may keep your own tradition."

Yes, they were committing sacrilege of the highest order.

They were rejecting God's holy commandment and replacing it with their own traditions.

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Well, it's a sad picture that we have before us.

God had raised up a special people to be a light in a dark world, and they had dishonoured His name.

Romans 2:23-29 **"Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?**

24: For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written.

25: For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a

breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision.

26: Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision?

27: And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfill the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law?

28: For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:

29: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God."

And with these final words, God concludes
His evaluation of mankind.

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Let's take a moment to summarize what we
have learned so far.

In Chapter 1, we saw the immoral Gentile
professing total ignorance of God's
existence in an attempt to rid himself
of any responsibility to do His will.
God didn't buy it.

In fact, He declared them **"without excuse."**
My creation makes Me **"clearly seen"** to
anyone with an unbiased mind.

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Then, in the first half of Chapter 2, we see
the moral Gentile.

--- **"measuring themselves by themselves,"**
they are quite confident of their
standing before God.

After all, they're not like those other people.

God didn't buy that either.

They were inexcusable, because in their hearts, they did the very same things that they condemned.

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And then, in the second half of Chapter 2, God examines His own Chosen People. To a man, they had trusted in their national heritage and an outward show of religion.

God wasn't impressed. In fact, He said --
"he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God."

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So, in every case, when God examined man's heart, the results had been disastrous. And you know what? God has always had that uncomfortable way of getting to the heart of the matter.

Turn with me to Genesis 6:4 and you will see what I mean --- **"There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown."**

Many people believe that this verse describes the intermarriage of the godly line of Seth and the ungodly line of Cain.

And if this was the case, then such a union could only produce compromise.

After all, you can't mix dirty water with clean and expect to come up with clean. Neither can you mix unrighteousness with righteousness and come up with a godly result.

However, this time the principle didn't seem to apply.

In fact, the children born as a result of these unions were --- **"mighty men which were of old, men of renown."**

Yes, the results were quite impressive, but that's not the way God saw it.

V 5-7 **"And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.**

⁶ **And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.**

7 **And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them."**

What a contrast between man's view and God's --- **"men of renown,"** and **"it repenteth me that I have made them."**

In Romans Chapter 2, God is still looking at the heart, and once again, the whole situation spells disaster.

The prophet summed it up very well in Jeremiah 17:9-10 --- **"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"** -- (And by the way, the answer to that last question is found in the very next verse) **"I the LORD search the heart, I**

try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings."

And that, in a nutshell, is what man can expect outside of God's grace.

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But what about those who are inside the grace of God?

Is the heart of the Christian of any concern to God?

Yes, it certainly is.

A dedicated heart is the one prerequisite for a fruitful life in the service of God.

Take King David, for instance.

Certainly he had his faults, but God could always say, **"I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfill all my will."**

He couldn't say that about Saul.

And in the end, He couldn't say that about David's son --- **"For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father."**

So, Christian, **"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."** Proverbs 4:23

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Getting back to Romans Chapter 2.

We have just witnessed God's evaluation of mankind, and it's not a judgment that would be compatible with human reasoning.

Such statements as --- **"if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made**

uncircumcision", and **"For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly,"** would be hard to accept, especially by those with a Jewish background.

And since Paul was the human author of this epistle, it would fall to him to defend this line of reasoning.

In Chapter 3, we find him doing exactly that.

Anticipating each objection one by one, Paul provides the appropriate answer.

Romans 3:1 **"What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision?"**

Well, that's a good question, isn't it?

What was the point of all those special advantages if the Jew was going to end up as bad as the rest?

Here's Paul's answer, in V 2, "**Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.**"

Certainly, much has been laid at their door, even by God Himself.

Nevertheless, no one can argue the fact that the Jew has been God's faithful librarian.

He has preserved and handed down God's Word to the rest of us, and in the original text, not one jot or tittle has been lost.

And then Paul addresses the more negative aspect of Israel's contribution.

V 3-4 "**For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith (or the faithfulness) of God without effect?**

⁴ **God forbid: yea, let God be true,**

**but every man a liar; as it is written,
That thou mightest be justified in thy
sayings, and mightest overcome when
thou art judged."**

Certainly, Israel brought the kingdom to a
screeching halt by the rejection of
their Messiah.

Nevertheless, that didn't change the fact
that God had kept His promise.

Nor did their unbelief frustrate His
purposes.

In the wisdom of the Almighty, a rejected
Messiah became the **"Lamb of God, which
taketh away the sin of the world."**

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However, this revelation only brings up
another question.

V 5-7 **"But if our unrighteousness commend
the righteousness of God, what shall we**

say? Is God unrighteous who taketh
vengeance? (I speak as a man)

⁶ God forbid: for then how shall God
judge the world?

⁷ For if the truth of God hath more
abounded through my lie unto his glory;
why yet am I also judged as a sinner?

⁸ And not rather, (as we be slanderously
reported, and as some affirm that we
say,) Let us do evil, that good may
come? whose damnation is just."

So in essence, here is the logic behind this
objection.

Since it would be impossible for an accepted
Messiah to become a crucified Saviour,
how can the Jew be blamed for helping
God?

Here again, we must look at the heart view
rather than the end result.

Even though God worked it out for good, the Jew meant it for evil.

So, if God is to judge the world in righteousness, then evil must be judged as evil.

Or, as the scripture says -- "**Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man)**

God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world?"

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Well, all the evidence has been collected, and the objections have been answered. It is now time for the final verdict.

V 9 "**What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin;**"

Notice Paul's words, "**are we better than they?**"

He is referring to the Jew, and he is taking his place with his nation.

The answer is inescapable --- "**No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin.**"

Yes, when God looked at their hearts, He could come to only one conclusion --- **they are all under sin.**"

V 10-12 "**As it is written,** (referring to Psalm 14:3) **There is none righteous, no, not one:**

¹¹ **There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.**

¹² **They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable;**

there is none that doeth good, no, not one."

And even without this special insight into their hearts, their speech gives them away.

V 13-14 **"Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips:**

¹⁴ Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness:"

What a graphic description we have here! --

"Their throat is an open sepulchre."

And we're not talking about bad breath.

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A whitened sepulcher, gleaming in the morning sun, can look quite acceptable, especially if it is adorned with flowers.

But just unseal the entrance, and you'll
have to put a handkerchief over your
nose.

And so it is with the mouth.

It reveals the corruption within --- **"for
out of the abundance of the heart the
mouth speaketh."**

Do you want to do open-heart surgery?

Do you want to see what God sees?

Just keep your ears open long enough and you
will get a glimpse of the *heart*.

And man is accountable for his words.

Jesus warned us about that, in Matthew 12:36

**"But I say unto you, That every idle
word that men shall speak, they shall
give account thereof in the day of
judgment."**

Yes, man's heart affects his speech, and it
also affects his actions.

Romans 3:15-18 **"Their feet are swift to shed
blood:**

**16: Destruction and misery are in their
ways:**

**17: And the way of peace have they not
known:**

**18: There is no fear of God before
their eyes."**

Yes, history has proven over and over that
mankind is incapable of peace.

He is the enemy of God and everyone else.

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V 19-20 **"Now we know that what things soever
the law saith, it saith to them who are
under the law: that every mouth may be
stopped, and all the world may become
guilty before God.**

²⁰ **Therefore by the deeds of the law
there shall no flesh be justified in**

**his sight: for by the law is the
knowledge of sin."**

Yes, be he a Jew or a Gentile, **"all the
world" is "guilty before God."**

It's a grim picture, isn't it, but that's
the way God sees it.

And that's the way we must see it.

Accepting His diagnosis is the first step to
a cure.

In next week's lesson, we will be looking at
God's cure.