

The book of Romans – a book, a letter, in the Bible that has consistently changed people and changed the world. It's a deep book; it's like getting into the deep end of the pool. Together, we are getting our spiritual floaties off, and getting into the deep end of God's love – the deep end of who Jesus is, and what He has made available to you today! Romans is GOOD NEWS for you! Let's expect that God is going to do some transformation in our lives.

Introduction: Getting YOU out of the way

One of your biggest growth moments in life will be when you get YOU out of the way. The difficulty with the Jewish believers Paul addressed was that they were standing in the way of being right with God. They were relying on themselves, their Jewish status, smarts, and works, when they needed to rely on the Spirit's work within them.

Every person can get “themselves” out of the way. How?

Paul moves from “they” – the corrupt, depraved Gentiles, to “you” – the moralist, to talking to the “Jew.” – The Jew would have likely responded something like this: “Well, certainly Paul, you can't possibly treat us Jews like we are no different from the Gentiles. Have you forgotten that we have been given the Law of God, that we have been circumcised? We have the revelation of God, and the sign of covenant with God. Don't you see that this distinguishes us from all the nations of the world and protect us from God's judgement?” Paul replied by saying:

But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God¹⁸ and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law;¹⁹ and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,²⁰ an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth—²¹ you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal?²² You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?²³ You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law.²⁴ For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”
(Romans 2:17-24 ESV)

The church in Rome was a mixture of Jews and Gentiles. The Jews had been kicked out of Rome, then allowed back in. This resulted in the church, that was at one time primarily Jewish, being primarily filled with Gentile believers at the time Paul wrote his letter. The unseen problem that Paul is addressing is the same problem that has plagued the church throughout history – hypocrites.

Many of the Jews thought of their Gentile neighbors as barbarians who lived in ignorance. The Torah was for Jews the embodiment of knowledge and truth. Paul's words burst the balloon of Jewish pride and, perhaps our own pride too, as he attempted to help them get out of their own way and receive salvation through Christ, not through themselves.

Stop leaning on YOU.

Now, you claim to be a Jew because YOU lean upon your trust in the law and you boast in your relationship with God (Rom. 2:17 MSG).

Aramaic can be translated, “you take comfort from the law.”

You call yourself a Jew who: Relies on the law:

The instructions of the Lord are perfect, reviving the soul. The decrees of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. ⁸The commandments of the Lord are right, bringing joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are clear, giving insight for living. ⁹Reverence for the Lord is pure, lasting forever. The laws of the Lord are true; each one is fair. ¹⁰They are more desirable than gold, even the finest gold. They are sweeter than honey, even honey dripping from the comb (Ps. 19:7-10).

Ancient Jewish writings include statements like this:

In your law we have put our trust, because, behold, your Law is with us, and we know that we do not fall as long as we keep your statutes. We shall always be blessed; at least, we did not mingle with the nations. For we are all a people of the Name; we, who received one Law for the One. And that Law that is among us will help us, and that excellent wisdom which is in us will support us.

You call yourself a Jew who: Boasts in God:

This is what the Lord says: “Don’t let the wise boast in their wisdom, or the powerful boast in their power, or the rich boast in their riches. ²⁴But those who wish to boast should boast in this alone: that they truly know me and understand that I am the Lord who demonstrates unfailing love and who brings justice and righteousness to the earth and that I delight in these things. I, the Lord, have spoken! (Jer. 9:23-24)

As Paul addresses the Jew, boasting in God was not the problem... that was a good thing. But as we will see, the problem was boasting in God, while at the same time dishonoring Him with your behavior.

We are made to desire approval, to want acceptance – it’s why a father or mother can affect our lives so much. Everybody wants to feel like they matter, that they have worth. For the Jew, it was all about being Jewish, being God’s chosen people, they were entrusted with God’s laws... so instead of that just being a blessing, it became something they leaned on to find worth and approval in the eyes of God.

We are hard wired to want approval and acceptance. *What have you leaned on, in order to find approval?*

Teach yourself and start living what YOU know.

You know His will, convinced that you are a guide, a teacher - do you teach yourself?

If YOU are sure that YOU YOURSELF... (see Rom. 2:19):

- Know His will – see Ps. 119:105

Wow... we know more than just about who God is, we know His will, how He desire that we live, how we treat one another...

- Are instructed in the law
- Guide the blind
- Light those in darkness
- Instruct the foolish
- Teach children

The problem is they do not live up to their knowledge. Possession of the law means nothing if you don’t obey it.

We reproduce not what we know, but what we do.

Is it possible that you currently know more than you are living? That you know more about what you should be doing, than you are actually doing? What are you going to do about that?

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples,² “The teachers of religious law and the Pharisees are the official interpreters of the law of Moses.^[a]³ So practice and obey whatever they tell you, but don’t follow their example. For they don’t practice what they teach” (Matt. 23:1-3 NLT).

Jesus was always upping the game. Jesus said:

If you withhold something that is rightfully theirs, you are stealing (Mk 7:9-13).

If anyone looks at a woman with lust in his heart, he has committed adultery (Matt 5:27-28).

Beware of the destructive power of pride.

Your biggest problem in life isn’t somebody else, it’s you!

Having a teachable attitude wins over being a teacher any day. Being a “teacher” can make you look smart; being teachable makes you smart.

Most people are all about getting in life. They ask, “What can I get out of this job, this relationship?” The teachable are asking, “What kind of person do I need to become?”

What is your big dream in life? What kind of person do you need to become to live that kind of life?

“What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens,^[g] but you ignore the more important aspects of the law—justice, mercy, and faith. You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things” (Matt. 23:23 NLT).

Become a mirror that reflects God more than YOU.

You are so proud of knowing the law, but you dishonor God by breaking it.²⁴ No wonder the Scriptures say, “The Gentiles blaspheme the name of God because of you.” (Romans 2:23-24 NLT)

The Jews were supposed to be a light to the Gentiles, a representation of who God is on the earth. But because of the way that they lived, instead of living a life that reflected God’s goodness, their lives reflected the wickedness that was in them.

What do people think about God as they watch your life?

Often the worst enemy to the gospel (or God’s honor) is the sin in the lives of those who profess to be believers.

Your authentic obedience is what matters.

What if every day your life could reflect the nature of God? What if your life was a mirror of His kindness, His compassion, His laughter, His joy, His empathy?

You will not reflect head knowledge about God; you will reflect a heart experience with God, or a lack of that.

I'm convinced that our world—that you and me—that we—need to be reflections of who God is to each other and to all those around us. Paul's scathing rebuke of the Jew who knows one thing, but lives something else, is a healthy reminder for every one of us today.

²⁵ For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. ²⁶ So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded^[a] as circumcision? ²⁷ Then he who is physically^[b] uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code^[c] and circumcision but break the law. ²⁸ For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. ²⁹ 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 (Rom. 2:25-29 ESV).

First Paul said, "Just because you have the Law of God, doesn't mean you are right with God;" it's your obedience that matters! Now he says, "Just because you are physically circumcised, as an outward sign of covenant, doesn't mean you are right with God; it's your inside, your heart, that really matters!" Circumcision was the mark of covenant relationship with God (see Gen. 17:9-14).

Rely on the inward work of the Spirit, not your outward works, to qualify YOU to be in God's family.

Already in the first century A.D. the sign of circumcision had replaced the significance it represented, and was regarded as a "passport to salvation" and being in God's family.

In contemporary Judaism, we find such statements as, "The circumcised do not descend into Gehenna," or "at the last Abraham will sit at the entrance to Gehenna and will not let any circumcised man of Israel go down there." To the average Jew, circumcision seemed to have carried an unquestioned pledge of security. Paul parted ways from his fellow Jews on this issue. For them circumcision was the covenant; for him it was the sign of the covenant!

Its value depends on fulfilling the substance it signifies, i.e., the covenant of obedience, similar to wedding rings today that have meaning only so far as the vows or commitment symbolized by them are fulfilled.

The ultimate sign of membership in the covenant of God is neither circumcision nor possession of the law, but the obedience which both circumcision and the law demand. This is not salvation by obedience, but obedience as the evidence of salvation.

What Paul writes here about circumcision and being a Jew could also be said about baptism and being a Christian. The real Christian, like the real Jew, is one inwardly; and the true baptism, like the true circumcision, is in the heart and by the Spirit. It is not in this case that the inward and spiritual replace the outward and physical, but rather that the visible sign (baptism) derives its importance from the invisible reality (washing from sin and the gift of the Spirit), to which it bears witness. **It is a grave mistake to exalt the sign at the expense of what it signifies.**

The Bible warns against replacing obedience with ritual.

The inward work of the Spirit, not outward works of people, makes our heart right.

It will be an inward work of the Holy Spirit, such as the law as an external written code could never affect, that will transform a person. Paul is giving us a taste of what is coming in Romans 8 – life in the Spirit, being led by the Spirit or being led by your flesh.

An inward work of the Spirit will result in outward works... and not the other way around.

And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart.^[a] ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations (Ez. 36:26-27 NLT).

For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him (Phil. 2:13 NLT).

Do you trust in the Spirit or yourself? It all comes back to the condition of the heart, by the Spirit, not the letter.

But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. ⁵ God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children.^[b] ⁶ And because we^[c] are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, “Abba, Father.”^[d] ⁷ Now you are no longer a slave but God’s own child.^[e] And since you are his child, God has made you his heir (Gal. 4:4-7 NLT).