

# ROMANS

## Session\_5

2:25 - 3:20

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### Outward Sign vs. Inward Reality

As Paul was concluding his case against the self-righteous Jews in verses 17-24 of chapter 2, he concluded with the indictment of the history of national Israel and how through their rebellious hearts had repeatedly made a mockery of Jehovah to the nations around them. When it comes to guilt then, they are just as guilty as any Pagan who has not been given God's specially revealed law. Two of the primary marks of self-confidence of the self-righteous Jews were the circumcision and the Sabbath.

In the last part of chapter 2 Paul addresses the outward mark of circumcision as it had become one of the leading sources of false security to those Jews that were living a life of false religion and hypocrisy. It had become a tire with no air; a mark without substance. As Paul has been pointing out that with God, nothing escapes His notice, he demonstrates that the same is true of the "sign" of circumcision.

### Outward Circumcision Can't Save You

***2:25-27) "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? Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law."***

***Circumcision - obey vs. disobey*** - God called Abram out from Ur of the Chaldeans (Gen 12:1-3) and made an unconditional covenant with him. This covenant was confirmed in a blood sacrifice (Gen 15:18-21) and reiterated to Abram when God further stressed His covenant with Abram (Gen 17:1-8) changing his name to Abraham. In order to "mark" Abraham and his descendants with a sign of the covenant God gave the circumcision:

*"And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you." [Gen 17:9-11 ESV]*

At this point, no formalized law had been given to Abraham, only the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant that God demonstrated that He would bring to pass. But Abraham did obey God in his direction to leave his home and be set apart unto the Lord. Abraham actually never learned of God's formal law for the Jews as that didn't come later, yet he obeyed the things that God had told him to do. The sign of circumcision was given as an outward mark to demonstrate the being "set apart" to the promises of God.

If God's Spirit didn't move in Abram and he ignored God's call on him, the circumcision would not have been given. So clearly, as Paul will later stress, faith came before the circumcision and the law. Those who trusted in the sign of circumcision had rejected the point of it. They ignored the "heart" of the law, invented many of

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their own customs. As we looked at the fact that Paul described the law as a “tudor” and that it was never intended to save, never the less, the fact that it is good and perfect and intended to set the people of God apart should bring about the response that the Psalmist declared “I delight in your law”. The self righteous don’t delight in the law because they don’t know the mercy of God and use the law as a weapon to elevate their own ego while holding others in contempt.

So the sign of circumcision had become an easy way to appear sanctified, yet they were not actually loving the Lord or His law. When Paul states **but if you break the law...** he is speaking to the willful rejection of it; hypocrisy. The self righteous Jew had become unmerciful, unjust and full of pride misrepresenting the very heart and nature of God. This state of heart rendered the outward sign of no value.

However, if the Gentile believer regarded God’s law and righteousness and delighted in it while trusting in God’s forgiveness and mercy, that one is circumcised effectually even without the outward sign. Paul adds **will he not judge you..?** Jews looked down on Gentiles to the point that they were considered dirty as dogs and not fellow human beings (not God’s intent). Even in the early church as God began moving on the hearts of Gentiles and saving many, the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:6-29) had to determine the manner of their salvation in regards to Judaism. If Gentile believers, not having circumcision, believed and desired to obey God’s righteousness, their response to God serves to condemn those who said they knew God and did not.

**2:28-29) "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."**

When looking at his argument the reader must be careful to not put words in God’s mouth that are not here. Paul is not disclosing some secret identity of the Jewish people to mean it was always the church or that His promises to Israel are really to the church. Through their history from the calling out of Abram, the giving of the law until the time of Christ, Israel had around 2,000 years of history in which Jehovah exclusively marked the nation out. While His unconditional election of the nation stands as is repeated throughout scripture, God never intended for that to be taken as automatic salvation for each individual blood Jew regardless of the condition of their heart.

In fact we see the opposite of that through the study of her long history of obedience, wandering, rebellion, judgment and repentance. The law was given for this purpose. To point out that their salvation would always be based on Gods grace and power. Furthermore their history demonstrated that God never ignores sin and always dealt with rebellion. Paul is not here negating God’s promises to the nation, rather he is pointing out that those who cling to their identity as a Jew by blood cannot presume upon God’s favor for that reason alone. The true **Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is and matter of the heart.**

Paul adds to this a simple statement (that he will later define) how ones heart actually becomes circumcised to God - **by the Spirit, not by the letter.** Unless the Holy Spirit of God moves on dead sinners, they are condemned by the law and remain uncircumcised spiritually even if they “rely” on the law.

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### The Advantage Of The Jew And God's Judgment

**3:1-2) "Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God."**

**Advantage has the Jew / value of circumcision** - Here in the first part of chapter three Paul now has to counter the attacks against him from the Jews and the Judaisers. The unbelieving religious Jews who rejected Jesus that Paul was once a part of, were actively attacking Christianity as some sort of departure from Old Testament teaching. They viewed it as blasphemy against Jehovah rather than believing in Christ as a fulfillment of the promises of God.

An even more evil form of persecution and attack against the truth of the gospel came from the Judaisers. They were Jews who claimed to be followers of Christ while trying to force circumcision and Mosaic ceremony and customs on Gentile believers. Both groups attacked Paul by claiming that He was writing off 2,000 years of Jewish history and in effect the promises of God to the nation. Paul will make it clear throughout this epistle that this is the opposite of what God has revealed!

Paul says the value of circumcision is **much in every way**. As God's called out / elect nation (Isa 45:4; 65:22) they have the advantage of having God's specific written Word. Paul says in chapter 15 *"For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope"* (v.4). But this hope was never intended to be derived from human effort, rather scripture always made it clear that God would bring about the reason for this hope where human effort always fails.

Jesus Himself claimed *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them"* (Mat 5:17). While there is evidence from scripture that there were Gentile proselytes to Judaism, the Gentiles were not nationally exposed to these special promises disclosed by God's oracles prior to the church age. There were many Jews in the time of Christ who had the "heart" of the law and recognized that Jesus was the promised Savior based on what the OT had revealed.

#### PERSONAL APPLICATION

Paul says to Timothy *"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,"* (2Tim 3:16). The whole counsel of God's Word is relevant and imperative for every believer to study and grow; none of it is to be ignored.

**3:3-4) "What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written, "That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged.""**

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**Some were unfaithful** - It is important to remember that not every single Jew rejected their Messiah, just as through their history God has always had a remnant (more on this in chapters 9-11) of genuine believers within the nation no matter what the national spiritual condition is at any given time. While the religious and civic leaders of Jesus's time along with many of populous rejected Him, there were those who by God's grace were believing. The gospel went out to the Gentiles through Jewish believers. So it would be error to say that Jesus was rejected by every Jew.

**Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means!** - Thinking back to Paul's opening to this letter when referencing Jesus as Lord and Savior did it within the context of the promises to Israel that came through His revealed Word; specifically referencing the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 7). Later in this epistle Paul will disclose that the national position of Israel as being hardened in their hearts toward God and His anointed was not some unforeseen thing that God had to devise an alternate plan for, rather God has used it for His purposes.

In His wisdom He will continue His promises to the nation as revealed throughout the scripture in the way and by the means that He has always intended from before the foundation of the world. So in response to any who would claim that due to the current national rejection of Jesus Christ by Israel, she has made null and void the promises of God concerning her future, Paul proclaims "**mē genoito**" (**may it never be!**), the strongest negative in the Greek. This is an expression of impossibility. Specifically because His unconditional promises were not based on the ability of man but on His power and will.

Paul quotes from Ps 51:4 in declaring that no matter what human "wisdom" concludes God will never go back on His promises as He has written them down. "*God is not a man that He should lie*" (Num 23:19) and any who would claim that the sinfulness of man can overpower God's promises are making themselves a judge of His promises and His ability. But as David said in this Psalm quoted by Paul, God's perfection and His Word will never fail against human scrutiny.

### **Anticipating The False Perception Of God's "Unrighteousness"**

**3:5-6) "But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.) By no means! For then how could God judge the world?"**

This defense against human logic is similar to what Paul responds to in chapter 6 and in the middle of chapter 9. When human logic seems to contradict the logic of God, it is not God who is found in error, rather flawed human thinking is. **I speak in a human way** - Paul points out that he is responding to an erroneous thought that God's righteousness is somehow impugned when His righteousness is magnified against fallen humanity's unrighteousness and yet carries out wrath against it. Again - **By no means!**

**How could God Judge the world?** - Just as God gave Adam the one law in the garden in order to demonstrate His authority and His righteousness, the law given to His people Israel is the righteous standard by which they will be judged. If God were duplicitous and unrighteous, He would have no basis upon which to render judgment.

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**3:7-8) "But if through my lie God's truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? And why not do evil that good may come?--as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just."**

**Through my lie = His glory** - again similar to other anticipated points of sinful human response to his teaching Paul brings up the fact that many will claim that God isn't justified in condemning sinners if He is glorified when He is found true and human logic and presumptions are found false; if He gets glory anyway why does He still judge?

Even further in this perversion of righteousness some charged Paul / Christian teaching of promoting evil actions so that God's good plans can come about. Paul's response demonstrates that God is not mocked and **their condemnation is just**. The mystery is that God can use all things, even the sin of humanity to accomplish His purposes and yet in no way is the tempter of humanity (Jas 1:13)

### God's Universal Verdict On All Humanity

**3:9) "What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin,"**

While Paul just made the case for the advantage of the Jew when it comes to the knowledge of the promises and law of God, at the same time Paul reiterates the fact that it doesn't make them righteous or in a better standing than the Gentiles when it comes to sin. Paul draws from the "oracles of God" to prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that all men are guilty before God in character (10-12) word (13,14) and deed (15-17).

### The Fallen Character

**3:10-12) "as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. " "**

Quoted from Psalms 14:1-3 and 53:1-3. Paul stands on Gods written word for authority and here proclaims that **none is righteous, no, not one**. Righteousness flows out of who God is. It is intrinsic to His nature. Even Adam, while created innocent and proclaimed "good" by God, didn't possess righteousness as an intrinsic quality or else he would not have fallen into sin.

Additionally **no one understands** the mind of God and His holiness. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians *"But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised"* (1Co 2:14). In Ephesians 4:18 Paul expresses this as humanity being *futile in their minds and darkened in their understanding*.

Perhaps the worst part of this, and yet the most important part of understanding God's sovereign grace, is the fact that **no one seeks for God**. So far in Romans (and elsewhere in scripture) humanity is not portrayed as

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having a “God - shaped hole in their hearts”. Rather, as Paul has already pointed out, mans natural bent is to reject the God of Creation and His law, the result being that they would rather invent their own gods made with their own hands instead.

In the final indictment on the character of man God declares that **no one does good, not even one**. This is in light of fallen humanity’s perspective that doesn’t retain God in their knowledge. Without God’s glory in mind and outside of redemption, there is not God - honoring intent in the actions of humanity no matter how good it appears.

### The Speech Of The Fallen Human

**3:13-14) " "Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips." "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." "**

Jesus said to the Pharisees *"You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks"* (Mat 12:34). Unless the truth of God abides in the heart, then true life does not flow out of the mouth, rather human wisdom leads to death (Prov 14:12; 16:25). From the “smallest” lie to the greatest deception this is the common expression of humanity without God.

James challenges even believers with this:

*"So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so." (Jas 3:5-10 ESV)*

### The Actions Of The Fallen Human

**3:15-17) " "Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known." "**

From Isa 59:7,8 the actions of fallen humanity cause others to suffer. From the first murder by Cain to modern crime and warfare humanity is driven by sin into a multitude of ways and “reasons” to murder. From large scale wars to the slaughter of the innocence and everything in between sinful man never fails to destroy the image of God. While he was said to be a man after God’s own heart by God Himself (1Sam 13:14), David was not permitted to build a temple to the Lord because he had “blood on his hands” (1Chr 22:8; 28:3). Individuals and societies that are lawless are surrounded by **ruin and misery**. The ultimate display of murder was

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displayed in the murder of Jesus. The religious establishment hated His actual perfection and truth. His righteousness exposed their sin. Luke records the sentiment of Jesus as he was entering Jerusalem:

*"And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes." (Luk 19:41-42 ESV)*

In the days leading up to both the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, the false prophets of Israel claimed "peace, peace, when there is no peace" (Jer 6:14; 8:11; Eze 13:10). The earth will not experience true peace until the Prince of Peace comes to rule the nations with a rod of iron (Ps 2:9; Isa 9:6,7; 32:17; Ezek 37:26; Rev 2:27; 12:5; 19:15). Paul gives the motive for what lies at the heart of humanity's destructive state:

**3:18) " "There is no fear of God before their eyes. " "**

Quoted from Psalm 36, this is the reason is given for humanity acting out on what is in their heart and having no restraint. There is no reverence for God and His glory and even worse no fear over the final confrontation they will have with Him who is able to destroy both the body and the soul in hell (Mat 10:28).

**3:19-20) "Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. "**

Both Jew and Gentile have the knowledge of sin and are under the law in this summary statement of 1:18 - 3:20. **Every mouth may be stopped / held accountable to God** - In case there be any reason to not have clarity in what he has made the case for, Paul makes sure that the reader knows there is not a single human being that isn't guilty before God. Rather whatever law they have makes it clear that they are sinners and know it.

**By works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight** - This is speaking to the final judgment of God when all humanity will be examined by the holy, omniscient gaze of the Lord. Being justified is not something a human being can gain by his efforts in this life, no amount of "work" can achieve justification. Now that he has made the case for the guilt of all people, Paul will move towards how one can be justified in the eyes of God and escape His wrath.

### PERSONAL APPLICATION

Are you trusting in your own efforts to find justification in the eyes of God? In John 15:1-17 Jesus says "I am the true vine" and reminds those who would follow Him "Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (v.5). Our justification and "good works" come from Christ alone; are you abiding in Him?