

The Apostle Paul has laid out a premise that those who by faith are righteous have life or we could say that the righteous live by faith (1:17). He went on to say that everyone is accountable to God because creation speaks of His attributes (1:20). Sin is living contrary to those attributes. That is rebellion against our Creator. He went on to explain that if we insist in going against God's nature, He will give us over to our lusts which are destructive (1:28).

Last week in the beginning of chapter two, he caught his readers by surprise by saying that we are all in the same boat (2:1). It is not our knowledge that counts but our actions. We are usually guilty of the sins that we point out in others. Only a transformed heart will express itself in right actions. We are either selfishly sinning and storing up wrath against ourselves on Judgment Day or we are doing good and will receive blessing, glory, and honor from the Lord (2:8-10). Paul is making sure his readers understand that simply having the Scriptures or being a descendent of Abraham does not mean you will escape God's wrath upon evil. God is impartial to our lineage or head knowledge (2:11). We are judged on what we do in this life. That is why we all need a Savior!

12 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. 13 For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. Romans 2:12-13 (ESV) The history of Israel proves this point. When they came into the Promised Land, they were given the land because the people that lived there were hopelessly given over to sin. When Israel reached the same point, they were driven from the land as well (2Chronicles 36:14-16). It doesn't matter if you grow up in a Muslim culture, a secular culture, or a Christian culture. If you do evil, you will be judged. You may be able to quote the entire Bible. If you don't do what you know is good, then you are even more accountable.

This is a main point in the letter from James. *22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. 24 For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.* James 1:22-24 (ESV) If you read it but don't apply it, it does you no good. You go away unchanged. The Word of God is all about change. Its message is that we are fallen and need to be transformed by its words (1Peter 1:23). We need to surrender to its teachings and have our thought life and actions turned around as the next verse in James teaches. *25 But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no*

Commented [notes1]: Romans 1:17 (ESV)
¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

Commented [notes2]: Romans 1:20 (ESV)
²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

Commented [notes3]: Romans 1:28 (ESV)
²⁸ And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.

Commented [notes4]: Romans 2:1 (ESV)
¹ 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.

Commented [notes5]: Romans 2:8-10 (ESV)
⁸ but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.
⁹ There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek,
¹⁰ but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek.

Commented [notes6]: Romans 2:11 (ESV)
¹¹ For God shows no partiality.

Commented [notes7]: 2 Chronicles 36:14-16 (NIV)
¹⁴ Furthermore, all the leaders of the priests and the people became more and more unfaithful, following all the detestable practices of the nations and defiling the temple of the LORD, which he had consecrated in Jerusalem.
¹⁵ The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place.
¹⁶ But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the LORD was aroused against his people and there was no remedy.

Commented [notes8]: 1 Peter 1:23 (ESV)
²³ since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;

hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. James 1:25 (ESV) That is the blessed life! It is continuing to let the Word of God change our thinking and actions.

Paul is warning Jew and Gentile that when we know what is right and don't do it, we are destined for the righteous wrath of God. But someone might argue, as is often the case today, "How can God condemn those who never heard of His standards?" Paul has already made the case that nature declares the attributes of God, but in the next verse he adds another reason all people are without excuse.

¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them ¹⁶ on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus. Romans 2:14-16 (ESV) When someone is repulsed by a murder, or hesitates to commit adultery, or is angered when someone abuses a child, we can see that God's moral law is written in our hearts. When someone who has never read the Bible knows it is right to honor their parents (Ephesians 6:1-2), then we see the law of God was implanted in their conscience. When Jesus Christ comes to judge mankind and they stand before Him, God will use their own conscience to convict them of their rebellion. What person can say they have never violated their conscience? Each of us has a conscience that tells us we are guilty of violating it at some time, if not many times.

The end of that last verse almost sounds like an oxymoron. "... on that day when, according to my good news, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus." If God is going to judge the secrets of our hearts, and our hearts are evil (Jeremiah 17:9), how can that be good news? Well, Paul hasn't got to that part yet, but he will get there. First we must understand and believe the bad news. That is a big problem today. Most people seem to think they are going to heaven or that they will just cease to exist. If the enemy of our soul has an effective tactic, this is it. He has lulled people to sleep by promoting the God of love without judgment. That is why parents and schools and society are avoiding discipline. "It's never your fault. Everyone is a victim of one kind or another." There is little fear of God and His righteous judgments in our society today (Proverbs 1:7).

Paul's language should cut right through our cultural hardness. You and I will stand before a holy God and He will judge the secrets of our hearts. Our private thoughts are known to Him. He hates evil and must judge evil because He is righteous. There is no such thing as little white lies to Him. There is not a smile for crude innuendoes (Ephesians 5:4). There is only the blinding white light of His holiness. He won't give you any credit for knowing every Bible story or attending church every Sunday. Community service does not erase sin. He will judge us according to what we did and the thoughts

Commented [notes9]: Ephesians 6:1-2 (ESV)

¹ Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.
² "Honor your father and mother" E(this is the first commandment with a promise),

Commented [notes10]: Jeremiah 17:9 (ESV)

⁹ The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

Commented [notes11]: Proverbs 1:7 (ESV)

⁷ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Commented [notes12]: Ephesians 5:4 (ESV)

⁴ Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.

we entertained. If that doesn't put the fear of God into us, we don't understand what Paul is saying or the righteous judgment that sin deserves.

Because this is such a problem in our culture, let me try to make it a little clearer. I know this makes us feel uncomfortable, and it should. That is the point. Paul wants us to see how desperately we all need a Savior. **All evil is participating in rebellion against God.** It is joining in with those who spit on Jesus on the cross while He was dying for their sins (Luke 18:32). It is joining the mockers who challenged Him to come down. It is aligning ourselves with Satan in his prideful rebellion. If you want to grasp the extent of what God feels about sin, look how severely He dealt with it on the cross!

Every sin has consequences. We see it compounding in the world today. Just as it was in the days of Lot, the pain of man's inhumanity to man is reaching a crescendo in the heavenly realm, crying out for justice (Genesis 18:21).

Paul continues by speaking to the religious Jew that might think himself or herself exempt from what Paul is saying. 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?* Romans 2:21-22 (ESV) I believe Paul is referring back to the secrets of men's hearts being judged by Jesus. To do something in your heart is tantamount to actually doing it. It reveals the nature of our heart. I may not steal a man's possessions or his wife, but if I covet it in my heart, then the desire is there. It is only the fear of the reprisal of the legal system or the person that keeps me from acting on what I desire (7:7-8).

Jesus said the same is true for adultery (Matthew 5:28). What man has not lusted after a woman in his heart? We are fallen. We are sin sick. While Jews expressed a great disgust for idols, they would take the meat from an altar if no one was around and feed their family with it. Paul is trying to get his readers to see that the religious are often the biggest hypocrites.

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 2:23-24 (ESV) Paul quotes Isaiah 52:5, which is somewhat out of context for the chapter, but is really in context of the entire book of Isaiah. The Jews were a bad example to the nations around them. Instead of being a light to the world of the blessings that come when you worship and obey YHWH, they were causing people of other nations to blaspheme Him. Instead of loving their neighbors, they treated them with contempt and abused them. They didn't draw people to the truth of His word; they repelled people away from it (Ezekiel 26:33)!

Commented [notes13]: Luke 18:32 (ESV)
³² For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon.

Commented [notes14]: Genesis 18:21 (ESV)
²¹ I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me. And if not, I will know."

Commented [notes15]: Romans 7:7-8 (ESV)
⁷ What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."⁸ But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead.

Commented [notes16]: Matthew 5:28 (ESV)
²⁸ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Commented [notes17]: Ezekiel 36:23 (ESV)
²³ And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.

Is this a word for today? I can't tell you how many people have said they won't hire a Christian. Why? It's because someone with a fish on their name card took advantage of them. They did a poor job, insisted on being paid in advance and never finished or something similar. Of course it is not true of all, but it is true of enough that God's name is blasphemed among the unbelievers because of us (2Samuel 12:14a). The hypocritical life of people that call themselves Christians causes people to have a poor opinion of Christians and even to blaspheme God. How important it is for us who call ourselves Christians to live as examples of Christ! We have a great responsibility to overcome the bad examples by living in a generous and self-sacrificing way so that, as Peter wrote, "...though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us (1Peter 2:12)."

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 as circumcision? 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. Romans 2:25-27 (ESV) This was the one outward mark that made Jews distinguishable from Gentiles. One Jewish commentator wrote, "Our Rabbis have said that no circumcised man will see Hell."^[1] But Paul is saying that it doesn't make any difference if the life is not changed. If a person lives according to their conscience and what nature has revealed to them of God, will they not condemn the circumcised man who does not live up to what he teaches?

This applies to the churchgoer today. Some people see their neighbor going to church each Sunday morning, but when there is a neighborhood dispute, the person acts in an entirely selfish way. Will they not condemn the person as a hypocrite? It may be that their church doesn't teach the life transforming power of the Word and God's Spirit, or it may be that the person hears it but has never allowed God to give them a heart transplant, taking out our heart of stone and giving us a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26). If the heart isn't changed, the speech and actions won't change.

Heart transplants are about as invasive as you can get. First you cut open that breast bone. Then you put the patient on a bypass machine and stop the old heart, cut it out, insert the new one and shock it into starting up. A spiritual heart change is just as invasive. Your old heart needs to die. You have to have a new one from Jesus that has His desires, that abhors what He abhors and loves what He loves. And sometimes we need a shock or two to get His life flowing through us.

Paul knew what he was talking about because before his heart transplant he was super religious and his heart was uncircumcised. His body was circumcised but that said nothing about his heart. But then he met Jesus and the surgery began.

²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will

Commented [notes18]: 2 Samuel 12:14 a (KJV)

¹⁴ Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, ...

Commented [notes19]: 1 Peter 2:12 (ESV)

¹² Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Commented [notes20]: Preaching the Word - Preaching the Word – Romans: Righteousness from Heaven

Commented [notes21]: Ezekiel 36:26 (ESV)

²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. Ezekiel 36:26-27 (ESV)

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. Romans 2:28-29 (ESV) We must be very careful interpreting this verse. It does not mean that the Jewish people as descendants of Abraham are no longer a part of God's plan. Paul will go on to show that there are two kinds of Jews. There are children of Abraham's faith (inward) and there is the nation descended from Abraham (outward). Paul is not saying the believer's DNA is altered to become Jewish. There are promises to the physical descendants of Abraham that are yet to be fulfilled. A read through the Prophets will make that clear (Zechariah 12:7-9; Ezekiel 36:32-36).

The church has two interpretations of this passage. The other is called Replacement Theology. It teaches that all the promises to the Jewish nation are now for the church. In their understanding, the church has replaced the nation of Israel as God's chosen people. It is true that the church is made up of people that God has chosen. We disagree on whether all the prophecies now apply to the church and not to the physical descendants of Abraham.

What Paul is saying is consistent with the Moses (Deuteronomy 10:16) and the prophets (Jeremiah 4:4). Circumcision was always to be a matter of the heart. The outward act was only symbol of what should be in the heart. It was to have a heart sensitive to God's Word and will for one's life. That is a spiritual Jew. And that only comes when one is made righteous by faith in God's provision. They've had a heart transplant! We must count on God to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. Then, as Paul will later explain, we are grafted in to the tree of faith, those prophets and patriarchs that have gone before us (11:17-18).

The question is this, **have you had a heart transplant?** Are you circumcised in heart? Is your heart tender toward God, sensitive to His voice, and yielded to His will? Have you escaped the wrath to come that we all deserve? It's only by faith that we are righteous and have that new life. It's only because God paid for us the penalty we deserve. And if you have by faith received the righteousness of Christ and found life through that heart transplant, are you living in obedient gratitude today? Is your life an example that draws others to Jesus?

Questions

- 1 What has Paul taught before this?
- 2 What must we add to hearing the Word?
- 3 Why is there no excuse?
- 4 Why should we fear the wrath of God?
- 5 Why are hypocrites so damaging?

Commented [notes22]: Zechariah 12:7-9 (ESV)

⁷And the LORD will give salvation to the tents of Judah first, that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem may not surpass that of Judah.
⁸On that day the LORD will protect the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them on that day shall be like David, and the house of David shall be like God, like the angel of the LORD, going before them.
⁹And on that day I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.

Commented [notes23]: Ezekiel 36:32-36 (ESV)

³²It is not for your sake that I will act, declares the Lord GOD; let that be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel. ³³Thus says the Lord GOD: On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places shall be rebuilt. ³⁴And the land that was desolate shall be tilled, instead of being the desolation that it was in the sight of all who passed by. ³⁵And they will say, "This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden, and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited." ³⁶Then the nations that are left all around you shall know that I am the LORD; I have rebuilt the ruined places and replanted that which was desolate. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it.

Commented [notes24]: Deuteronomy 10:16 (ESV)

¹⁶Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.

Commented [notes25]: Jeremiah 4:4 (ESV)

⁴Circumcise yourselves to the LORD; remove the foreskin of your hearts, O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem; lest my wrath go forth like fire, and burn with none to quench it, because of the evil of your deeds."

Commented [notes26]: Romans 11:17-18 (ESV)

¹⁷But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, ¹⁸do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you.

- 6 Why do people blaspheme God on account of us?
- 7 What happens when you have a heart transplant?
- 8 What are two types of Jews?
- 9 What are the two interpretations of verses 28-29?