

240623am Sermon Transcript

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Romans 2:12-29

(This sermon transcript is an extract of a video recording of the full service. The numbering is auto-applied and reflects the number of minutes into recording that the transcript relates to.)

54:46

Well, as you turn your Bibles to Romans chapter 2, beginning in verse 12, I wonder if we could reflect on the fact that we live in days where everyone wants to be granted an exception when we get things wrong.

55:00

So perhaps you missed a deadline for some homework or some coursework, and we write to our teacher, Please, could we have a little more time? Or maybe you get a parking ticket because you're perhaps parked on some double yellow lines, and so you write in to make your appeal. The sign was not particularly clear.

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The lines were faded, I couldn't see them.

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Or perhaps we do something wrong and we know it's wrong.

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We say, I know I shouldn't do it, but it's not my fault,

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it's the fault of my upbringing or something that happened in the past, and that's why I need an exception.

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We tend to think, don't we, that our own situation is unique and for that reason we should receive special treatments.

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And what we do in life in general,

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we apply to our relationship with the God of heaven.

56:03

We know that we've done wrong, and we say it's good that God will judge others justly. We need a God who's going to be just and righteous, who won't overlook sin but will deal with it because justice must be done.

56:19

But I deserve special treatment.

56:22

I'm an exception.

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I shouldn't be judged in my sin and therefore I don't need to turn to the Lord Jesus Christ.

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We've been working through the book of Romans. We're going through Romans chapter one to three,

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and in these chapters Paul, the writer inspired by God, goes to great lengths to show us that all people do need Jesus Christ. And there are no exceptions when it comes to God's judgments. He, he's building an extended argument through these three chapters. And if you have a Bible and you turn on to chapter 3 and verse 9, Paul's going to come to his great conclusion that we'll come to in a couple of weeks. Chapter 3,

57:09

verse nine, he says, for we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles, that's all people alike, are all under the power of sin. He wants us to see that we are all guilty before the God of heaven.

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And that verse 19 of chapter three, he will say, now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law so that every mouth may be silenced. And, and here's the key point. The whole world's held accountable to God. That's a summary of what Paul is doing these 33 chapters. He's saying the whole world is accountable to gods

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and he does that

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so that we might see

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the

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the, the huge importance, the central importance of being right with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. So that we might know that our only hope is the good news of the gospel, that we might know the righteousness of God that comes through faith, through believing in Jesus. As he said, his chapter one verses 16 and 17, He wants us to see that is the only hope for any person

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and to make that case in chapters one to three. What Paul has been doing is he has been addressing different groups of people.

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He's as it were, looking around the room and he's addressing different groups in the room

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as he thinks of all of humanity. So in in the second-half of chapter one, in verses 18 through to 32, he's addressing immoral, evil people who are outwardly evil, who have no interest in gods.

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And Paul says you need Jesus Christ.

59:02

He turns in in chapter 2 and verses 11 to sorry, 1:00 to 11:00, as we looked at last week and says that even upright good people, people who live morally upright lives,

59:15

still need Jesus Christ. And the fact that we look down on others, the fact that we judge others, shows that we need the Lord Jesus because we still sin.

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And Paul is going to continue to do that in our passage this morning. He's going to continue to think about different groups of people,

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and he's going to have two further groups in view. He's going to think about Gentiles in verses 12 to 16, and then he's going to think about Jews in verses 17 through to 29. And he's going to deal with three common excuses that people give for why they don't need the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 common excuses people give for why they are excused from God's judgments. And to say, well, I'm OK.

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But before we pick up those 3 excuses,

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Poles argument in these verses is careful and tight.

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But

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this is not an academic debate for Paul.

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It's not like he's just there in a debating society and making a case just because he wants to make a point.

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This really matters for Paul and it should really matter for all of us because of verse 16.

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Look at what he says in verse 16. He speaks of something that will take place on the day when GAIL judges

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people's secrets through Jesus Christ. As my Gospel declares,

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Paul knows and we need to know, that there will be a day, the day

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when God will come to judge through Jesus the secrets of our hearts.

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And for that reason, it should matter to everyone of us here this morning.

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The day is coming

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when all of our hidden secrets will be known,

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when all of our hidden secrets will be judged,

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and many think they will be able to claim an exception on that day.

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Well, in these verses, God wants us to know that our only hope is not to claim an exception,

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but to look to Jesus Christ by faith.

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So let's pick up those 3 excuses. We turn to the first, which is in verses 12 to 16 where where Paul addresses this excuse. Someone who might say I never knew about sin and so I can't be guilty of sin. The first point, I never knew about sin and so I can't be held guilty for my sin. They're in verses 12 to 16. Now this excuse comes up when Paul is talking about God's fairness and God's justice.

1:02:01

He has said in verse 11 that God does not show favouritism, he is totally just in his dealings. And so in verse 12, Paul says God's fairness means that God will judge us according to what we know.

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He speaks of two groups In verse 12. He speaks of the Jews who have the law and who speaks of the Gentiles who, as he says, are apart from the law.

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So what do you mean by the law here? He means the Old Testament Scriptures and particularly the first five books of the Bible. And in those first five books of the Bible, God defines rights and God defines wrong through his law. We've we've looked at the summary of that law in the 10 Commandments as he worked through the series in Exodus.

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So Paul says those who have the scriptures, second part of verse 12, who are under the law, they are the Jews who have the Old Testament scriptures. When they sin, they will be judged by that standard, by the law. Paul says second-half of verse 12. So he's saying that they knew right and wrong because they had the Old Testament, they had the moral law of God there in the Old Testaments. They knew what was right and wrong. They sinned,

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so their judgement is fair.

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But then he addresses a second group at the start of verse 12, those who don't have those Old Testament Scriptures, those who are Gentiles, and he speaks to them as those who are apart from the law.

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And he says when they sin, they will perish apart from the law.

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What's his point here? His point is that they have no Old Testament scripture, so they're not judged by that written law of the Old Testament scripture.

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Some, though, then think that's my chance for an exception.

1:04:02

I I never had a Bible. I never heard about sin as it was defined in Scripture. So. So God can't judge me because I never knew I'd done something wrong,

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and so I could keep on doing wrong with no thought of God and no need to turn to Jesus Christ because I just didn't know.

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I never knew about sin, so I can't be guilty.

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This is like the employee who goes out to buy a sandwiches each day in his first month of work and

then claims a sandwiches every day as a job expense. At the end of the month, he makes his first expenses claim and the manager challenges him. But what did he say? Well, he says, I never received the employee handbook and the expenses policy. I didn't know it wasn't permitted

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or perhaps more close to home. It's like the speeding driver who stopped by the police and who claims there never was a 30 mile an hour sign when they came into the town and so had no idea the speed limit had changed.

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What's wrong with that way of thinking?

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Wow, it is a misreading of verse 12.

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Verse 12 tells us that God is fair and God will judge according to what we know,

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but not having the written Old Testament scriptures in your hands does not exclude you from judgement.

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Now Paul says that those who sin apart from the law will perish apart from the law and the word perish implies that God will judge and there will be a guilty verdict. So then we say, Paul, how is it they know about the standard of God's right and wrong?

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And that's what Paul explains in verses 12. Sorry, 14 and 15.

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He explains that those who don't have the Old Testament scriptures, who are not Jews, like most of us, still know right and wrong. How?

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Because whilst they don't have God's standard written in a book in having the Old Testament in their hands, they do have that same standard written on their heart.

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That's the key point here.

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Many people, Paul says, are normally truthful.

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They do, by nature the things required in the law. They are normally faithful to their spouses. They respect property

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and as we look across the world we see that is generally the case, isn't it? It's astonishing thing that that generally speaking, every culture, even if it's never had any external influence, still has a similar legal code.

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And we do that, verse 15, because the requirements of God's law are written on our hearts.

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We have a conscience that tells us some things are right and some things are wrong. And on that conscience God has put His moral law. Those 10 commandments are there in every human heart. They're placed there by the living God so that all people know the standard of God's righteousness, whether or not they have the Scriptures.

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That's why as we think about the story of the Bible, particularly at the beginning, if you think about Cain and Abel,

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the sons of Adam and Eve, and Cain murders his brother Abel and God judges him. And how could God do that? Because as you think about Genesis one to three, the spoken command, you shall not judge isn't sorry, you shall not murder is not there,

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but it is written on Kane's heart. That's how the standard is there,

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and that means that all people know enough

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about sin for God to judge.

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Now let's just step back for a second and see what Paul's been teaching us here.

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Because God has put Paul has taught us that God has put two pieces of knowledge

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out there for everyone

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who is alive.

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Two key pieces of information we saw in chapter one there in verses 18 and 19 and 20, that God's existence, his eternal power and divine nature are visible from

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the creative world around us.

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So creation shows us that God is there. But here's the second piece of information God has given to all people, the second bit of knowledge that all people have. All people know God standard of right and wrong because the law of God is in their heart.

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You and I have that law in our hearts this morning,

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and that means that in terms of judgments, there is no category of those who have not heard.

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There is no back door into heaven for isolated tribes who have never had a Bible

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because God says they know enough

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to be judged.

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But in terms of salvation,

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then there is a category of those who have not heard of Christ, they haven't heard the gospel. And so whilst they're under judgement, the Lord calls us to take that gospel to all people.

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And this is one of the big reasons for mission, friends, that creation and conscience are enough for God to judge, but all people need to hear the gospel to turn to Jesus Christ. And that is what drove missionaries to the ends of the earth. I was listening to the story the founding of the modern mission movement this week

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and of men like William Carey who went and others who held the rope and funded him so he could go. And they went because of this great reality.

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Creation shows that God is there. Conscience tells us we have done wrong,

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but people need to hear of Christ.

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But it also gives us great courage

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and great boldness and great help when we share the good news with anyone.

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Because think of it friends, God has given you 2 great allies. Whenever you speak to anyone about the Lord Jesus, there is an ally in creation that shows them that God is there. And we can say, open your eyes, look around you, look at the creation. It declares that God is there. And God has given you an ally on their inside, in their conscience. They know right and wrong. You can say reason with me about

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right and wrong because of this reality of conscience. So, so someone might say, well, well, sin isn't a problem because there's no objective standard. I can do whatever I want,

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but suddenly everyone believes in an objective standard when their phone is stolen, don't they?

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We all believe in objective right and wrong when someone takes our wallet or steals our car or takes our mobile phone. And why is that?

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It's because the law of God is written on the heart.

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So not having a Bible, not knowing the written law, does not exclude you from judgments because you know in your conscience you have done wrong. All need Christ. That's the first excuse. What about the second one? Well, the second one comes up in verses 17 to 24

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where it goes like this. Someone says I have the Bible, I teach the Bible, and that means I'm OK. I'm a special case before God.

1:12:00

Our second point. I have the Bible, I teach the Bible and that means I'm special.

1:12:06

Now that first excuse was one that a Gentile might give, but the 2nd and the 3rd will be one that you might have heard from Jewish people and poor particularly addresses Jewish people in these verses and and they would rely on two great privileges, that possession of the law, the Old Testament scripture,

1:12:28

and the physical act of circumcision.

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Now, to be really clear here, Paul's purpose is not to make an ethnic slur against the Jews.

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Horrible things have been done to the Jewish people through history, and Paul is not a part of that in any way.

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But he does want to show that no, no one is excluded from the need to trust in Jesus Christ, including the Jewish people.

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And so he turns in verse 17 to explain how a Jew might feel privileged because they had the Old Testament law.

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Look down at the verses. They they found security in the law. They were relying on the fact that God had given them the Old Testament. They said, look at this, we're privileged because we have the Old Testaments. They said, verse 18, we we know God's will and therefore we're superior because we have the law. We know. So we know what is superior because we have the law.

1:13:31

We have been instructed by this same law. God has taught us so much. Verse 18

1:13:37

And not only that, we have taught that to others versus 19 and 20. We have we've taught the truth to other people

1:13:47

and we have the truth. Verse 20

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We have in the law the embodiment of the knowledge and the truth.

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So Paul is saying that their possession of the Old Testament scriptures made them puffed up and confident just because they had the Old Testaments

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and because of their

1:14:11

pride

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and their confidence. Poor responds very sharply, asking some searching questions.

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You see them there in verses 21:22 and 23,

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he says. You teach others about the Bible,

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but do you teach yourself?

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You preach against stealing,

1:14:36

but do you steal yourself?

1:14:39

You call out adultery,

1:14:42

but do you commit adultery as well?

1:14:46

What is Paul doing here? Paul is saying, I was calling us to remember that the 10 commandments, God's standard for right and wrong, was never just about the external and the outward.

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It was also about the heart and what happened on the inside.

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And the summary is for those who have the Scriptures, who teach the scriptures and think that makes them privilege, he says. Because you do not practise what you preach, your situation is very serious.

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Look at verse 23. You who boast in the law,

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do you dishonour God by breaking the law? That was a hugely serious thing for a Jew to think they were doing,

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dishonouring the Lord God.

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And then he says verse 20, verse 24, he says the Gentiles, those who don't know the Lord God, look on at your lives and they reason wrongly that if your lives are wicked, then your God is wicked also. And so God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of the sins of his people.

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Friends, what Paul is saying here is that having the Bible does not create superiority, but rather responsibility.

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Not first to others, but first to yourself.

1:16:09

Having God's truth, having the Scriptures, should always lead you to come to the cross. Why?

1:16:19

Because whenever you read God's Word, you read it first for yourself. Whenever you read God's Word, it should challenge you first. Not puffing you up in pride and superiority, but driving you to your knees, making you more humble, confessing your sin, and looking again to the Lord Jesus Christ by faith. That is what the Jews didn't do when they just said we have the Bible, we teach others the Bible, and we're OK.

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But there are warnings for us as well. Here too,

1:16:56

your Bible knowledge will not save you.

1:17:02

You must respond to what you know personally.

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It is a tragedy that there are some people who know how

1:17:12

to be right with God,

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but because of their pride,

1:17:17

they will not humble themselves and personally confess their sin and come to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

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Knowledge is not enough,

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it must be something you do personally.

1:17:33

Always connect the Bible with how you live. Be so careful about a detached and purely theoretical knowledge of the Bible, because if you just stop there with knowledge alone, it will not save you.

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It must be personal.

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It must be experienced.

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It must be in the heart as well as in the head.

1:18:03

It is not just that Jesus died, it is that Jesus died for me

1:18:12

and for those who teach and preach. There is a special warning here, a solemn warning for us to hear.

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And I'm not just thinking of those who preach in services. I'm thinking of those who teach in any kind of context.

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Before you think or dare

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to stand before others or speak truth before others, always apply God's Word to yourself personally.

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When you study and when you prepare, do it first for the good of your own soul. Ask yourself first, where is God challenging me in this passage? Where is a sin that I need to turn from? Where are our promises that I need to cling to?

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And then when you've done that,

1:19:02

you are ready to speak it to others.

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Always be challenged yourself personally.

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So friends, having the Bible

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teaching the Bible does not excuse anyone from judgments.

1:19:18

It creates responsibility for us to sit under it, responding rightly and turning to Jesus Christ.

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That's the second excuse that Paul addresses. Then there's a third one, a third and final one.

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And here the excuses to say I'm very committed, surely that's enough, I'm very committed, surely that's enough. And that's in verses 25 to 29.

1:19:44

Now we've seen a Gentile excuse. I didn't know about sin. How am I accountable? Paul has addressed that. We've seen this excuse that comes from having the Bible and resting in what you have and teaching to others. And Paul says that's not going to save you.

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But here's the third category, and perhaps this is where it comes particularly close to home.

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Because again, it's a category for the Jews, but it applies to all of us. Here

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Paul picks up another reason why the Jews might think they are a special case. And God's judgement will not. Come on then.

1:20:17

And it is an outward sign of commitment that they were trusting in

1:20:22

the act of circumcision.

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And they say, well, I received this outward mark of devotion and commitment to God, and that means I'm gonna be safe trusting in an outward sign. Now circumcision was an outward physical sign of belonging to the Jewish nation,

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and those who received it, either as infants or adults could claim that their parents are very committed to God, and so had had them circumcised as an infants. Or they themselves are very committed to

God, because they had come to, to follow the Lord and had chosen to be circumcised in the old time of the Old Testaments.

1:21:03

But it was an outward sign of devotion, commitment and dedication,

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and many trusted in an outward act of circumcision to save them.

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One of the rabbis torts Circumcision will deliver Israel from judgments.

1:21:25

Puts you in a special category. That means you're gonna be OK.

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Now look down at Paul's reply in verse 25. He says circumcision has value. It's good, a good thing to be a Jew because you have special privileges. You have the Old Testament, you have many other things, but it doesn't exclude you from judgments. And breaking the law takes away all the benefits of circumcision

1:21:54

because you still broken the law. So you can't claim that your circumcision is an exception.

1:22:01

Because, friends, what God really cares about is not outward actions but inner dedication.

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So what matters is not is that we're devoted to Him in our hearts, as seen in how we keep the law. That's what Paul picks up in verses 25 and 26.

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They who obey the law, who are dedicated to God in the hearts, who are inwardly committed to the Lord, they are regarded as circumcised. One of God's people

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versus 28 and 29. Paul says that that the people whom God, God calls Jews, his true people are not those who are just outward and physically committed and devoted,

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but rather, and here's the key thing,

1:22:51

it is those who have a circumcised heart. Verse 29

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who are devoted to the Lord through inner commitments.

1:23:02

So Paul is saying the outward sign of commitment to the Lord is not gonna save you. Outward actions that you are committed to God are not the basis of your salvation. Something needs to happen on the inside. Something needs to happen in your hearts. Something needs to change on the inside.

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But then we might ask, how is that? Can that can happen? How can that happen? Because which of us can reach into our hearts and make our hearts committed to Gods?

1:23:33

The more you try to do that yourself,

1:23:36

the more you fail.

1:23:40

Martin Luther was a very religious monk who wrestled with this very problem.

1:23:47

He knew that God was there, he knew that he had done wrong, and he tried to change his own heart to be acceptable to God through outward acts of devotion. But he could never do it. And this was particularly seen in how he approached confession.

1:24:06

So when he was a young man, he lived in a monastery and and back then in the monasteries there were younger monks and there were senior older monks and their younger monks would come and confess their sins to the older monks as a a means they thought of outward commitments. Now most of the young men would be there for 10 to 20 minutes at most.

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That young Martin would come for two to three hours at a time to confess his sins.

1:24:35

The senior monks became frustrated with him. They said if you're going to come and confess, then at least bring some really big sins instead of giving us a a long list of minor problems now. Now they thought Martin was overreacting. But actually Martin was following his training as a lawyer before he became a monk, and he was putting his trained legal mind to work as he examined his life in the light of God's law.

1:25:05

And the more he did that, the more he looked at his life in the light of God's law, the more problems he founds.

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But he realised he couldn't do it in his own strength. He couldn't change himself on the inside. He couldn't circumcise his own heart to make it devoted to God

1:25:27
until he came to trust in Jesus Christ.

1:25:32
And then something happened.

1:25:35
Then he knew real inner change, real inner commitment, not just outward action.

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Friends,

1:25:47
the lesson for us here

1:25:49
is that you and I cannot change our hearts to make them committed to God.

1:25:54
Only God can do that

1:25:57
and that's why we need verse 29, the work of the Spirit who comes to change our hearts and to make them committed to the Lords. The written code, the law could never do that. It can only show us sin, but it can't changes on the insides,

1:26:19
but the Spirit of God can. The Spirit of God can give us hearts devoted to Him, committed to Him,

1:26:31
and there are many

1:26:32
who trust in signs of outward dedication to God's thinking. That means they won't be judged.

1:26:42
And friends, that's wrong

1:26:45
because outward actions are never enough.

1:26:51
Some trust in church attendance and think as long as I'm here on a Sunday,

1:26:57
that will save me.

1:26:59
Others trust in religious ceremonies like baptism and think, well as long as I've been baptised I'll be fine.

1:27:08
Some trust in religious services like communion, the Lord's Supper, and they think if they take that then they'll be saved.

1:27:17
Others trust in giving generously to Christian work and think that will make me right with God.

1:27:25
Friends, all of those things are expressions of a changed heart,

1:27:31
but they do not change your heart.

1:27:36
And it is possible,

1:27:38
and maybe there are some here this morning,

1:27:41
who are trusting in the outward expressions of true Christianity

1:27:46
without having experienced that inner transformation that comes by faith alone and the work of the Spirit.

1:27:55
Do not make that mistake.

1:27:59
You need Jesus Christ

1:28:02
to pay for your sin.

1:28:05
You need the Spirit of God to come and change you on the inside first.

1:28:12

You need Him to give you a devoted heart. You need Him to give you a new heart, and you need Him to change you from the inside out

1:28:24

so that then you will come and be a committed follower of Jesus. But not because that outward commitment has done something,

1:28:33

but because God has changed you on the inside,

1:28:38

which has then come out for all to see on the outside.

1:28:43

So my plea as we close is do not trust in outward signs for your salvation.

1:28:51

Do not trust in the strength of your outward commitments in your list of things that you do for gods. Instead, trust in Jesus, trust in Him alone.

1:29:04

And as you come to Jesus, as you seek his forgiveness, as you say, Lord, I'm not gonna trust him, my goodness, I'm gonna come with nothing in my hands and just look to you on the cross.

1:29:19

You find forgiveness.

1:29:21

You find that your sin isn't just excused, it is paid for and forgiven.

1:29:29

And then friends, on that final day,

1:29:32

that day we thought of in verse 16, when God judges the secrets of people's hearts through Jesus Christ,

1:29:39

on that last day,

1:29:42

you'll send will not condemn you.

1:29:45

The deepest secret of your hearts

1:29:48

will not cut you off from the God of heaven,

1:29:51

because Christ has paid, and He has paid at all,

1:29:55

and you will know the blessing of eternal life.

1:29:59

Amen.