

Inside & Out

Paul calls us to an active faith that is inward and outward
Blueprint for Breakthrough Series – Part 5

Romans 2:12-29

April 11-12, 2026

Introduction

- Faith Deconstruction Series starts TONIGHT
- If we really believed:
 - **Deadly gas** was being pumped into the building we would leave.
 - An **inheritance** of \$34 mil was going to be deposited into our account, we would check.
 - Our house was being watched by **burglars** for a break-in, we would sure up our security.
 - **Costco** was running a half-off sale, we would go shopping.
 - There are certain outcomes that follow real beliefs.
 - In the same way certain realities demand certain outcomes.
 - Since most birds have working wings, they fly.
 - Since most boats are buoyant, they float.
 - Since earth has gravity we stick to it.
 - Since (Wienerschnitzel, Kings, Running, Suzi says I'm wrong)
- It's about consistency of reality. If one thing is true, then the next ought to be true.
 - Our spiritual lives – the same should be true of our spiritual lives. **If we believe we are children of God we should behave like it.** If we believe that Jesus Christ **died for our sins**, then we should **experience** that. If we have **committed our lives to advancing the kingdom of God, our agenda** should be set.
 - Talk is not enough – simply talking about things doesn't mean we truly believe those things. Talking about transformation doesn't mean we have transformed. Talking about the Bible doesn't mean that the Truth of the Bible has made a difference in us.
 - The easiest test – **the easiest test to find out if we truly believe something is to examine the evidence of how it's actually working out in our lives.** If we think we are connected to the Holy Spirit, but we are not **loving, not experiencing consistent joy, struggle with peace, aren't very patient, not kind to people we don't like, don't think about how to do good to others, break promises and commitments, are harsh or can't control our impulses, then we may not be as connected as we think.**

A transformed heart ACTIVATES a transformed life

Lesson

- Last Time on Series – **2 weeks ago** (last week was Easter), I taught the portion of Romans that said...
 - **Don't judge** the people around us, let God do that. We can judge behaviors and actions, but not people.

- We are all going to be **held accountable** for our actions to some degree. In the end **God will sort it out.**
- Context – **Paul is still primarily talking to Jews** (both Jewish Christians and traditional Jews). He is going to continue to **attack the idea that our genetics or our rituals make us holy. The Jewish people rightfully felt special, but they wrongfully thought themselves unaccountable.**¹
 - How this applies to us today – I realize that there are only a small portion of us here today that are Jewish. The rest of us are Gentiles (non-Jews). Since Paul is addressing historic Jews how do we apply this to ourselves? **It's human to assume that we can hide behind status and that how we view ourselves is how God and everyone else should view us. We believe we are the good guys and everything bad that we do we have a reason or excuse for. But the truth is God is the judge. He knows everything. No one is fooling Him. Whether we fool people around us or even ourselves doesn't matter. God knows what we do and why we do it.**
 - Common expressions:
 - How many of us believe our sin doesn't matter?
 - How many of us believe that if we are relatively good people we should be allowed in heaven?
 - How many of us feel that the good stuff we should do should outweigh the bad stuff we do?
 - How many of us believe ourselves to be Christians because we are a bit religious and we are Americans but there's no evidence of Christ in our lives?
 - How many of us think that if we just say we are Christians, we are Christians?
 - How many of us throw God a bone by doing some religious stuff and assume we're cool with Him?
 - How many of us are thinking that we are holier than everyone else?
 - See, it applies!
- The Rules of the Game
 - It's not what we say but what we do

¹ "The Gentile, so most Jews maintained, could experience God's favor only by taking on "the yoke of the law." Outside Israel, the sphere of the law, there is no salvation. The Jews who live within the domain of law, on the other hand, often considered themselves virtually assured of salvation." NICNT, Douglas Moo.

- Romans 2:12-13 - *“For all² who have sinned³ without the law⁴ will also perish⁵ 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 righteous⁶ before God, but the⁷ of the law who will be justified⁸.”*
 - For all who have sinned without the law⁹ will also perish without the law, - in other words, all Gentiles who sin because they are human, but don't know anything about the Jewish law that God gave Moses back in the day, they will die like everyone else but won't be judged by that specific law, only Jews will.
 - and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. – in a similar way, all the Jews who know God's law will be held accountable to that law and will be judged by it.
 - Luke 12:47-48 *“That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.”*
 - The two ways to heaven: The Jews didn't like the new way in Christ. This new covenant was odd and didn't feel right. They liked the old way, the old law. They wanted to stick with that. Paul points out that although God had laid out two ways now to get to heaven, there's really only one choice.

² “Verse 23 of chap. 3—“all have sinned”—shows that Paul would exempt no one from the verdict he here imposes. It is clear from these verses that Paul argues for universal human sinfulness, and a sinfulness of such a nature that condemnation must be the outcome.” NICNT

³ Sin = Hamartano – “to sin, to miss, not to hit; one who keeps missing the mark in his relationship to God.” (Lexical Aids to the New Testament: NASB Key Study Bible)

⁴ Law = Nomos – “law, from nenoma, perf. mid. Voice of nemo, either of distributing, assigning, because the law assigns to everyone his own, or of administering, because it administers all things either by commanding or forbidding. NT meanings: a law in general, most frequently, the divine law given by Moses, whether moral, ceremonial, or judicial. Sometimes it means the books of Moses or the Pentateuch containing the law, or the OT in general. The Gospel or gospel-method of justification, etc.” (Lexical Aids to the New Testament: NASB Key Study Bible)

⁵ “Gk. ἀπολοῦνται, a middle form of ἀπώλλυμι, “destroy.” The Scriptures frequently use this verb to depict the results of a negative verdict in the eschatological judgment (e.g., Pss. 9:5; 37:20; 1 Cor. 1:18, 19; 8:11; 15:18; 2 Cor. 2:15; 4:3; 2 Thess. 2:10). The metaphorical nature of the term precludes any conclusion about the final state of those who are so judged (e.g., one cannot build a case for “annihilationism” from this term).” NICNT, Douglas Moo

Perish = Apollumi – or apolloo, form the inten. Apo, and olluo, to destroy. In the NT to kill, destroy, whether temporarily or eternally.” (Lexical Aids to the New Testament: NASB Key Study Bible)

⁶ Righteous = Dikaios – adj. Or adj. Noun from dike, right, justice. That which is right, just, which is expected by the one who sets the rules and regulations whereby man must live. Being dikaios, just, means that one conforms in his action to his constitutionally just character. The rules are self-imposed. In the NT, those re called righteous, dikαιοi, who have conditioned their lives by the standard which is not theirs, but God's. They are the people related to God and who as a result of this relationship walk with God. A righteous person ione justified by faith and showing forth his faith by works.” (Lexical Aids to the New Testament: NASB Key Study Bible)

⁷ “It is because the law can justify only when it is obeyed; reading it, hearing it taught and preached, studying it—none of these, nor all of them together, can justify.” NICNT

⁸ Declared Righteous/Justified = Dikaioo – “to justify. Verbs which end in 00 generally mean to bring out that which a person is or that which is desired. IN the case of dikaioo, it means either to bring out the fact that a person is righteous, or if he is not, to make him righteous. To justify someone, therefore, means to bring out the fact that he is just or to make him just without necessarily referring to how it is accomplished.” (Lexical Aids to the New Testament: NASB Key Study Bible)

⁹ “When Paul talks about ‘the law’ he means the Jewish law, the Torah, the law given to Moses on Mount Sinai as the way of life for the people redeemed at the Exodus. It is, as we might say, Israel-specific.” NT Wright, Romans for Everyone.

- Pure self-righteousness (through faith)¹⁰ – The standard to get into heaven is perfection. If a human being, like Jesus demonstrated, could do EVERYTHING right at all times for their whole lives, fulfilling all that God sets before them and maintain pure righteousness, they will be fit for heaven. Of course, that’s not a thing, as we all readily see and admit.
- Grace and salvation (through faith) – The other way is to allow Jesus Christ, the Son of God to trade us His life and He would take our unrighteousness/sin and pay the penalty for it on the cross while giving us his perfect righteous life so that we are fit for heaven. That is called grace and salvation.
- For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified – The standard is based on actions not words. Righteousness, or moral purity, isn’t created by us thinking nice things and knowing good things we ought to do. It’s demonstrated and judged by what affect it has on our lives. Since we are talking about the Jewish Mosaic Law, Paul says, It is those that actually do everything right by their lifestyle and choices, that is in the law, that will be justified by it. You can’t just say you follow it, you have to follow it perfectly.
- The Ignorant
 - The Gentile example
 - *Romans 2:14-16 - “For when Gentiles¹¹, who do not have the law, by nature do¹² 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*

¹⁰ “Paul affirms the principle that doing the law can lead to salvation; but he denies (1) that anyone can so “do” the law; and (2) that Jews can depend on their covenant relationship to shield them from the consequences of this failure... First, to what degree and in what sense does Paul regard the law as a means of justification? The view that God gave the law to Israel as a means of justification is now generally discredited, and rightly so. The OT presents the law as a means of regulating the covenant relationship that had already been established through God’s grace. But, granted that the law was not given for the purpose of securing one’s relationship before God, it may still be questioned whether it sets forth in theory a means of justification. We would argue that it does. Verses such as Rom. 2:7, 10, 13, and 7:10 suggest that Paul agreed with the Jewish belief that justification could, in theory, be secured through works. Where Paul disagreed with Judaism was in his belief that the power of sin prevents any person, even the Jew who depends on his or her covenant status, from actually achieving justification in that manner. While, therefore, one could be justified by doing the law in theory, in practice it is impossible (see also the additional note on 3:20). This issue is related in traditional Reformed theology to the debate over the existence and nature of the “covenant of works” and the place of the Mosaic law within that covenant... The best answer appears to be that Paul takes a more radical viewpoint of what “doing the law” involves. Because he denies any salvific value to the Mosaic law and the covenant of which it is a part, he recognizes that it is not enough—and never has been—to seek to do the law, however sincerely. For, from the first, it has been faith in the promise of God, and only faith, that justifies (cf. chap. 4). This being the case, only a perfect doing of the law would suffice to justify a person before God. True, an insistence on perfect obedience is a departure from the Jewish view. But this is just what Paul has implied by putting Jews and Gentiles on the same footing with respect to works and judgment in 2:1–16. What he says here plainly implies that the covenantal structure within which the Jews thought their sins could be taken care of was itself denied by Paul. The enormity of God’s Son being crucified led Paul to take a far more pessimistic view of human sin than was typical of Judaism: sins that, for the Jews, simply needed to be atoned for within the covenant meant for Paul a breaking of the covenantal structure itself.” NICNT

¹¹ Gentiles = Ethnos – “a nation, people. Used by Paul for the whole race of mankind considered in a noble or enlarged view as one nation. Frequently signifies the heaven or Gentiles as distinguished from the Jews or believers.” (Lexical Aids to the New Testament: NASB Key Study Bible)

¹² Do things = Ergon – “work, performance, the result or object of employment, making or working. Denotes any matter or thing, any object which one may have to do or attain; the general object or result of doing and working, an object or result whose attainment or realization is not accomplished by a single act but by accumulated labor and continued work; labor enjoined by and done for Christ bas the spreading of his gospel and the furthering of his church; moral conduct.” (Lexical Aids to the New Testament: NASB Key Study Bible)

hearts¹³, while their conscience¹⁴ also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts¹⁵ accuse¹⁶ or even excuse them¹⁶ on that day when, according to my gospel¹⁷, God judges¹⁸ the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.¹⁹”

- For when Gentiles²⁰ - Since we have Gentiles reading this letter and in the church at Rome, let me explain how their reality works, Paul is saying. Gentiles are non-Jews. In the ancient world the Jewish people saw the whole world through us vs. them. There were Jews and non-Jews. I didn't matter where you came from if you weren't a Jew, you weren't a Jew and it didn't really matter. That category is called Gentile.
- who do not have the law, - Gentiles, as non-Jews, don't have the Mosaic Law. They weren't a part of that process and revelation. One of the key things that God started in Abraham was a special people group that get to receive special information so that God could move through them to reach the world.
 - Romans 4:15 *“Because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.”*
 - Romans 5:13 *“For before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law.”*
 - Romans 7:7 *“What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law.”*

¹³ Hearts = Kardia – “heart. The Scriptures attributed to the heart thoughts, reasonings, understanding, will, judgment, designs, affections, love, hatred, fear, joy, sorrow and anger since these things can actually affect a man's physical heart. Therefore, the heart is used for the mind in general.” (Lexical Aids to the New Testament: NASB Key Study Bible)

¹⁴ Conscience = Suneidesis – “conscience. To be one's own witness, one's own consciousness coming forward as witness. From suneidenai, to know together, heauto, with oneself. It denotes an abiding consciousness whose nature it is to bear witness to the subject regarding his own conduct in a moral sense. It is self-consciousness.” (Lexical Aids to the New Testament: NASB Key Study Bible)

¹⁵ Thoughts = Logismos – “from logizomai, to reckon. A reckoning, calculation, consideration, reflection. In the classical writers used of the consideration and reflection preceding and determining conduct. Used of considerations and reflections following upon conduct.” (Lexical Aids to the New Testament: NASB Key Study Bible)

¹⁶ Accusing = Kategoreo – from kata, against, and agoreo or agoreuo, to speak. To speak openly against, to impeach, accuse mainly in the legal sense.” (Lexical Aids to the New Testament: NASB Key Study Bible)

¹⁷ Gospel = Euaggelion – “gospel. Originally a reward for good news, later becoming the Good News. The Good News of the kingdom of God and salvation through Christ. In Paul's epistles used of the basic facts of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ and of the interpretation of these facts.” (Lexical Aids to the New Testament: NASB Key Study Bible)

¹⁸ Judge = Krino – “to divide, separate, make a distinction, come to a decision. NT meanings: to judge, try in a solemn judicial manner.” (Lexical Aids to the New Testament: NASB Key Study Bible)

¹⁹ “Some scholars consider the relationship between v. 16 and the preceding context so awkward that they eliminate the verse as a later, post-Pauline addition. Once this unwarranted and textually unsupported expedient is eliminated, several alternatives remain, of which five deserve mention. (1) Verse 16 could depend directly on the verbs in v. 15 if the processes described there are considered to be future. But we have seen good reason to attribute these activities to the circumstances of this life. (2) Verse 16 could depend directly on the verbs in v. 15 if v. 16 is taken noneschatologically as a reference to any “time” of judgment. But Pauline usage shows that “the day when the secret thoughts are judged” must be the last assize. (3) A popular alternative has been to take v. 16 with v. 13: “doers of the law will be justified ... on the day when...” But vv. 14–15 are too important to Paul's argument to be viewed as a parenthesis, and v. 16 is too far from v. 13 to think that a syntactical relationship exists. (4) Verse 16 could go loosely with the whole paragraph. But this sounds too much like a counsel of despair and gives to the opening prepositional phrase an unlikely function. (5) The final possibility, and the one we think is correct, is to take v. 16 with the verbs of v. 15, in the sense that the continual self-criticism of the Gentiles (v. 15) also relates to, and finds its ultimate meaning in, the final judgment (v. 16). As Käsemann points out, v. 16 is necessary to Paul's argument because his purpose, as we saw in v. 12, is to demonstrate the reality of the condemnation under which the Gentiles stand. As degree of conformity to the law is the criterion of judgment for Jews (vv. 12b–13), so the extent to which Gentiles have conformed to the “law” they possess will be the standard by which they are judged. Their conscience and thoughts reveal to them how well they have done, but in the judgment of God even the secret thoughts will be used as evidence.” NICNT

²⁰ “Verses 14–15 are a self-contained unit, linked to the preceding verses with a “for.” The nature of this connection depends on the identity of the “Gentiles” who are the subjects of these verses. From earliest times, three basic alternatives have been proposed:²⁵ (1) Gentiles who fulfill the law and are saved apart from explicit faith in Christ; (2) Gentiles who do some part of the law but who are not saved;²⁷ (3) Gentile Christians who fulfill the law by virtue of their relationship to Christ. As in the related vv. 7, 10, and 13, we think the second alternative is best. Our reasons for this conclusion will emerge as we analyze the details of the verses.” NICNT

- by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. – But just because the Gentiles didn't have the Mosaic Law that doesn't mean that they didn't know right and wrong. It doesn't mean that God didn't get things across to them about His expectations for mankind. In every people group God has spoken to some degree (whether He was obeyed or rejected and replaced in time is another matter). God is calling out to all mankind as His creation both through general revelation (e.g. creation) and through special revelation (e.g. direct contact on their hearts, dreams, one-on-one, etc.). To whatever degree God has revealed Himself they will be held accountable to that. That understanding becomes their 'law' in a sense (the code to which they will be held).
- They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, - Since it's the same God speaking to the Gentiles as well as the Jews, albeit through differing levels of detail, the tone and spirit will be the same. God's heart is God's heart. He may deal with one group differently than another, but since He is constant and consistent, there is going to be a similarity in expectation (e.g. why the Golden Rule seems to be in so many places around the world). What this reveals is that God is still speaking to mankind through their hearts even if He didn't give each people group a Moses and a mountain.
- while their conscience²¹ also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them – Internally the Gentiles will engage with God's will and heart and that will cause some tension. It is flesh's response and sinful expression to want what is contrary to God. There is going to be the good and bad tension. Since God has spoken to them there is going to be a small voice alarm put within them that helps to shape their morality (why there is so many common threads in religions across the world). Unfortunately, along with God's commands and expectations, there are a lot of voices in our heads that make things messy. There are selfish thoughts, there are bogus religious thoughts that we have been taught, there are opinions all around. This helps to shape what we call our conscience. Sometimes it's in alignment with God and sometimes not. But if we consider James 4:17 which defines sin as knowing the right thing but not doing it, it makes the conscience a type of self-designed standard to be held accountable to. Whether it's dialed in properly or not (calibrated to God), violation reveals the intent of the heart. The law may not be accurate but a violation of the law still reveals that someone is a lawbreaker.
 - Jas 4:17 – *"So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin."*

²¹ "The word "conscience" comes from the Greek rather than from the biblical world. The word had an important technical role in Stoic philosophy, but Paul's conception does not go beyond the more popular usage.⁵⁴ The conscience could be the source of moral norms (as in our popular use of the term), but it is usually viewed as a reflective mechanism by which people can measure their conformity to a norm. If, then, the "law" is that norm, the conscience of individual Gentiles reveals within each of them the extent to which that norm is being followed."

- What's a conscience? - The little voice in your heart and head that tells you that you are in violation of something is many times God and the Holy Spirit telling you where you have overstepped your boundaries and you better watch out, because God is displeased. However, it can also be simply a self-designed alarm going off about your own personal understanding of right and wrong, and not at all what God is stating. Over time walking with God we can begin to discern which voice is the Holy Spirit and which voice is our internal conscience. They are not the same thing. Both CAN be helpful but the conscience is only helpful if it's been calibrated by God's Word and the voice of the Holy Spirit.
- 1 Tim 4:2 *"Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron."* (cf. Rom 13:5; 1 Cor 8:7, 12, 10:25, 29; 2 Cor 5:11; Acts 23:1; 24:16; Rom 9:1.)
- on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus²² - Although there is a constant going back and forth with conscience in this life there is also going to be a day of ultimate judgment. This seems to be what Paul is returning to (we talked about Judgment a bit last week as well). He's explaining that there will come a final day of accountability where mankind must be shown for what it is. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who has been given the name above all names, will be the judge sitting on the throne judging not just actions but motivations and intents.
 - Psalm 139:1-3 *"O, Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways."*
 - We are all clear we are doomed as sinners, right? – In this day and age, especially in a church, it's strange to have to clarify this point, but we all realize that Paul's point that he's driving home here and elsewhere (more coming soon!) is that whether we are Jews or Gentiles we are all not-perfect and that means we are sinners. Nobody is getting out of that title. There are no 'good people' and 'bad people' in the human race, only 'bad people.' It doesn't mean that all people are as bad as one another or as bad as they can be. It only means that one violation of God = total violation and we are all guilty of that.
 - A word on the final judgment – I know that we talked about the judgment a bit last time we went through Romans, but you can never talk about judgment too much, right? ☺ I wanted to clarify something about the judgment that is theologically tense but not a lot of people put it together. The great final judgment (great white throne judgment – when Jesus sorts the righteous from the unrighteous – sheep from

²² "That God's judgment will take into account not only outward actions but also the "hidden things" is a natural inference from his knowledge of the secrets of people's hearts.⁶⁸ Jesus reminded his disciples that God's reward will be based on what is done "in secret." In the present context, this shows particularly that the inner witness of the conscience and conflicting thoughts (v. 15) are known to God and destined to be revealed on the day of judgment." NICNT

the goats, etc.) seems to be a final rendering but two different judgments in a sense.

- For the unbeliever – it's critical that we realize that the ultimate determination of our eternal destination has to do with our relationship to Jesus Christ. There are those that 'believe/trust' Him and those that do not. For those that do not believe (unbeliever), their sin has not been dealt with and therefore the judgment is based on their actions while in this life (as well as inherited sin likely – but that's another debate). Without the blood of Christ cleansing them, their actions are all that are left to judge and those actions are not perfect, but sin-stained. Therefore they are held in violation of the great LAW of God and a violation of Him. This = casting away into the lake of fire for their eternal separation from His presence which is accompanied by eternal torment (however it works).
- For believers – this is the part that not a lot of people get right (IMO). Too often people 'preach' two opposing concepts about Christians. On one hand they say that we will all give an account of our sin at the final judgment (sins called out) but that we will be called 'justified' and let into God's eternal presence. Yet, at the same time, they 'preach' that our sins are no more. They 'preach' that they are forgotten by God and are, 'as far as the East is from the West'. They 'preach' that Jesus took them on Him and paid for them. So, why are they being brought up again? In my opinion, the best Biblical reading is that they will NOT BE.
 - Christ took our sin – When we were cleansed by Christ He both took our sin away and purified us. We were justified in the moment that He called us His and we were made a 'new creation' (the old gone). So, there's no judgment for our sin that happens. Our sins aren't brought up.
 - Actions and rewards – What the judgment is for believers is a determination of rewards. They are based on actions done in this life and opportunities followed through on. Will that be embarrassing? I think so. I think that some of the 'wipe away ever tear' may be because of this (as well as the sadness of our loved ones going the other direction). Is there a realization and shock to seeing the big picture when God reveals it? Yes. Is there a jealousy between people (one got more rewards than the other)? I don't think so because all of this will be done in the presence of the real PURE ONE (God) who is PURELY judging, and we will all agree with His righteous judgment.
- The Informed
 - The Jewish example

- Romans 2:17-24 - *"But if you call yourself a Jew²³ and rely on the law and boast²⁴ in God¹⁸ and know his will²⁵ and approve²⁶ what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law;¹⁹ and if you are sure²⁷ that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness²⁸,²⁰ an instructor²⁹ of the foolish, a teacher of children³⁰, having in the law the embodiment³¹ 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 abhor³² 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 blasphemed³³ among the Gentiles because of you."*
- But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law³⁴ - Paul sharpens his assault on the self-righteous Jewish people that would hear about this letter and are seemingly causing problems (this seems to be a correction portion of the letter to the Roman church). He starts challenging them about their 'blessed status' and how they have fallen short of taking advantage of that and being true to God's intention for them. He begins with challenge #1: since they have the

²³ "The name "Jew," which originally referred to a person from the region occupied by the descendants of Judah, was applied to Israelite people generally after the Exile, when the territory occupied by the Jews encompassed not much more than the original Judah. By Paul's day, "Jew" had become a common designation of anyone who belonged to the people of Israel. It suggests the special status enjoyed by the people of Israel, in distinction from all other peoples (cf. 1:16; 2:9, 11). "To be named a Jew,"²³ then, refers to the religious status shared by anyone who belonged to the covenant people." NICNT

²⁴ "The final privilege enumerated in v. 17 is that the Jew "boasts in God." "Boasting" is not in itself wrong, as Jer. 9:23–24 (alluded to by Paul in 1 Cor. 1:31 and 2 Cor. 10:17) makes clear: "Thus says the LORD, 'Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows me.'" Thus, the Jews' "boasting in God" is not wrong in itself—an instance of human pride and arrogance—but a legitimate pride and joy in the God who had given to Israel so many good things." NICNT

²⁵ Will = Thelema – from the verb thelo, to will. The suffix ma indicates that it is the result of the will. Will, not to be conceived as demand, but as an expression or inclination of pleasure toward that which is liked, that which pleases and creates joy. When it denotes God's will, it signifies His gracious disposition toward something. Used to designate what God Himself does of His own good pleasure." (Lexical Aids to the New Testament: NASB Key Study Bible)

²⁶ Approve = Dokimazo – "Carried the idea of testing in order to prove the value of something, such as precious metals."

²⁷ Convinced = Peitho – "to entice or persuade. NT meanings: to persuaded, to seek to persuade or solicit the favor of; to prevail by persuasion. To be persuaded, assent, believe. To trust." (Lexical Aids to the New Testament: NASB Key Study Bible)

²⁸ Darkness = Skotos – "from ischo, to restrain, stop, for when we are overcome by the night we are forced to stop. Physical darkness; spiritual darkness, implying ignorance; sin and misery." (Lexical Aids to the New Testament: NASB Key Study Bible)

²⁹ Instructor = Paideutes – from paideuo, to instruct, correct, chastise. An instructor; a corrector, a chastiser." (Lexical Aids to the New Testament: NASB Key Study Bible)

³⁰ Infants = Neplos – "infant, from ne, not, and epo, to speak. A child not yet able to speak plainly; a young person underage; a child, a babe in ignorance and simplicity; a person weak in faith, a beginner."

³¹ Embodiment = Morphosis – "the activity of forming; shaping. Refers to a sketch, summary, corresponding to the high sense of pride with which a Jew who feels himself to be a teacher regards a book of the Law as a physical representation of absolute knowledge, and truth as the true depiction and representation of the idea of a divine form."

³² Abhor = Bdelusso – "to render foul, from bdeo, to stink. To cause to be abhorred, turn oneself away from a stench, detest." (Lexical Aids to the New Testament: NASB Key Study Bible)

³³ Blasphemed = Blasphemeo – "to blaspheme, revile; derived either from blapto, to hurt, and pHEME, reputation, fame, or from ballo, to cast, and phemai, pl. dat. Of pHEME. To hurt the reputation of smite with reprots or words, speak evil of. To speak with impious irreverence concerning God Himself, or what stands in some peculiar relation to Him." (Lexical Aids to the New Testament: NASB Key Study Bible)

³⁴ "The four sentences in these verses are best taken as rhetorical questions, in keeping with the diatribe style. They expose the Jew who has made the lofty claims of vv. 17–20 as inconsistent and hypocritical, as failing "to practice what he preaches." Such a charge was certainly not new. The OT (cf. Ps. 50:16–21), Judaism (cf. 'Abot R. Nat. 29[8a]), and Jesus (e.g., Matt. 23:3) made similar accusations. Paul's stress on "doing" as what ultimately counts before God surfaces here again. All the privileges, distinctions, and gifts that the Jew may claim are meaningless if they are not responded to with a sincere and consistent obedience. And it is just this obedience that is lacking." NICNT

revelation of God's divine will and law, they know more than everyone else and can judge everyone else. Paul is being a bit tongue-in-cheek here acting as if he agrees of their holier than thou status for a moment, only to bring it crashing down on their heads. The Jewish perspective was simply that; God told us more so we can know more than everyone else, therefore we are superior.

- Special Kids - It's hard to see the Jews in rebellion knowing all the benefits that they had being the chosen people of God, getting the miracles they did, having the history with God that they do, etc. It's like seeing rebellious kids of a well-known Christian household down the street. You want to be mad at them but you love their dad, he is so nice. You cut them some slack knowing that He is working with them.
- Gen 12:3 *"I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."*
- John 8:40-42, 44, 56 *"As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I hear from God. Abraham did not do such things. You are doing the things your own father does." "We re not illegitimate children," they protested. "The Father we have is God himself." Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me... You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire... Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."*
- Matt 3:7-9 *"But when (John the Baptist) saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance, and do not think we you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham."*
- and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children³⁵ - Challenge #2: Since they had God's special revelation in His law the Jews felt that they were the instructors for the world and everyone else was inferior. They considered the Gentiles babies, lacking any real knowledge and that they as parents could really show them the ropes. They saw themselves as superior in wisdom and knowledge and that the whole world should come to their doorstep to learn the truth about life.
 - Matt 23:24-28 *"You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind*

³⁵ "In vv. 17–18 Paul has listed five blessings personally enjoyed by the Jews by virtue of their being God's covenant people. Now, with a change in construction, he enumerates four prerogatives that Jews enjoy in relation to other people because of these blessings. Paul continues his direct address of a representative Jewish person: "being convinced that you are a guide to the blind, a light for those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of the immature." It is their uniquely detailed knowledge of God's will, revealed in the law, that renders Jews responsible to teach others. Paul's description of this role uses language drawn particularly from Jewish propaganda directed to the Hellenistic world. The Jews' sense of mission toward the rest of the world is rooted in the OT. When, therefore, Paul asserts that the Jew was convinced he was a "guide to the blind" and a "light for those in darkness," we think of the duty of God's servant—to some degree at least identified with Israel—to be a "light to the nations" and "to open the eyes of the blind." The Jews, however far short of their responsibility to enlighten the Gentile world they may have fallen, continued to boast in these mandates as a means of highlighting their importance and the value of their law in the eyes of a skeptical and sometimes hostile Gentile world." NICNT

Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness."

- Matt 5:14-16 *"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."*
- having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth³⁶ — Paul highlights that indeed there were beautiful, powerful and great things in the Law that God gave to the Jews. In a sense it was the knowledge and truth the world needs. However...
- you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? – this is where Paul slaps them with the information. So, you have all the right answers because you have special access to God, right? Then why are you so terrible with it? Why do you tell everyone else what to do but you don't do it? Ouch.
- While you preach against stealing, do you steal? – Paul gets specific. Let's talk about stealing. You tell everyone else not to steal and then you do it yourself. You don't just steal in regular ways and think that your relationship with God will cover over it and excuse it, but you steal in the name of God and religiously (e.g. the money-changers taking from the Gentiles and visitors – which caused Jesus to go ballistic on them).
- You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? – You pretend to be the moral police telling the world what they should and shouldn't do and putting them down for their sin when all the while you are doing the same things in secret. You are trying to take advantage of your status and God's grace by doing sin and thinking you won't be held accountable for it.

³⁶ "As he did in v. 18, Paul adds to his list of Jewish prerogatives a participial clause in which he traces the benefits enjoyed by the Jews to the law. Paul highlights the sufficiency of the law by claiming that it contains "the embodiment of knowledge and truth." Paul has asserted that all people, including especially those without special revelation, have access to "knowledge" and "truth" (1:18–19, 25, 28, 32) and are hence "without excuse" when they turn from it. The Jew has this knowledge and truth embodied in far clearer and more detailed form in the law, a claim he acknowledges, and indeed boasts of. Even more than the Gentile, therefore, the Jewish person is "without excuse" before God (2:1)." NICNT

- You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?³⁷ – This is a bit of a strange line in the letter and no scholars know quite how Paul intended it. It could be that he is talking metaphorically or that he’s talking literally. There was such a thing as Jews feeling free to steal and sell pagan idols as if it didn’t matter since they were pagan. So, it would sound something like: If you claim to hate idolatry so much and call it unclean than why are some Jews going around in the name of God and pillaging and stealing idols from pagan temples to resell on the market? If they are so bad why are they in the trunk of your car?
 - Acts 19:37 *“You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess.”*
- You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law – Paul gets more intense. You brag and brag about your special status and special revelation and yet you are consistently breaking it! What is wrong with you?!?!?!
 - For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you³⁸ - Paul is likely quoting Isaiah 52:5 here. The word for blaspheme is, ‘ruin the reputation of.’ The way the Jews were acting was making God look bad in the eyes of the world.
 - Is 52:5 – *“Now therefore what have I here,” declares the LORD, “seeing that my people are taken away for nothing? Their rulers wail,” declares the LORD, “and continually all the day my name is despised.”*
- True Jews
 - What makes someone righteous

³⁷ “The third sin is more difficult to identify. Paul’s claim that the Jew “detests idols” is clear enough, and captures an important element of Jewish religion in the first century. The threat to Jewish existence posed by the inroads of Hellenism and the dispersion of Jews throughout pagan society had led to increased emphasis on the need to avoid such pagan practices. Idolatry, in the technical sense, was generally unknown among Jews at this time. Indeed, what Paul accuses the Jew of doing is not specifically worshiping idols, but “robbing temples.” What Paul means by this accusation is not clear. (1) He might use the word in its natural, literal sense. While evidence that Jews engaged in the robbing of temples is scarce, there is some reason to think that the strictures against using the precious metals from idolatrous articles (cf. Deut. 7:26) were being relaxed and disobeyed. Paul could, then, be citing the use of such articles stolen from pagan temples as an example of a practice that contradicted the Jews’ avowed abhorrence of idolatry. (2) Paul might apply the word to the robbing of the Jerusalem Temple, which would be taking place when Jews failed to pay the “temple tax” that was required of all Jews for the support of the worship of the Lord. (3) Paul might apply the word to sacrilege in a general sense. For Paul’s accusation to make sense, this sacrilege would have to involve various acts (or attitudes) of impiety toward the God of Israel—as, for instance, elevating the law to such an extent that it infringed on the rights and honor of the Lord himself.³⁸ Each of these alternatives has its problems. Both the second and the third suffer from the difficulty that an act committed against the Jewish Temple or God is not a contradiction to the Jews’ abhorrence of idols. If we adopt the first alternative, on the other hand, Paul would be accusing his Jewish target of an offense that was, at best, rare. Nevertheless, this difficulty is not as great as the one faced by the second and third alternatives. Moreover, this interpretation places this third accusation on the same footing as the first two (see below).” NICNT

³⁸ “When he quotes Isaiah 52:5 in verse 24 – Israel had not just made a few mistakes. Israel had failed completely in the task God set her. The only way, now, was for God to send a Messiah who would take upon himself the effect of that failure, and, through him, would establish a new covenant. Isaiah 52 goes on, just a few verses later, to introduce the figure of the Suffering Servant who would die for the sins of Israel and for the world. Ezekiel 36 goes on to talk of a new covenant in which God will write his law on people’s hearts. Paul clearly has both themes in mind.” NT Wright, Romans for Everyone.

- Romans 2:25-29 - *“For circumcision³⁹ indeed is of value if you obey⁴⁰ the law, but if you break the law⁴¹, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision⁴².²⁶ So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded⁴³ as circumcision?²⁷ Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law⁴⁴ will condemn⁴⁵ you who have the written code⁴⁶ 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.”*
 - Let’s clarify circumcision questions and comments rules up front – I know that Paul is very free to talk about who is circumcised and who isn’t. I don’t want us as Bridgeway to make those determinations about each other or to ask freely among ourselves. Let’s leave some things to the imagination. Amen? 😊
 - For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, - Circumcision (see below) was a mark of a covenant agreement with God as special people. The males received it on behalf of their people as a visible outward sign of an inward agreement in their heart to obey all that God has put before them in the law. But that only counts if you actually obey the law that it symbolizes.

³⁹ “Circumcision, like the law, was a sign of the Jew’s privileged position as a member of the chosen people, participant in the covenant that God established with Abraham (Gen. 17). Later Judaism claimed that “no person who is circumcised will go down to Gehenna,” and the importance of the rite throughout the Second Temple period suggests that this view was prevalent in Paul’s day also. But Paul goes even further. Not only does disobedience of the law endanger the circumcised Jew’s salvation;² obedience of the law can bring salvation to the uncircumcised Gentile. Moreover, while Paul’s central concern is again (as in vv. 7, 10, and 14–15) to set forth the impartial standard of judgment outside of Christ, he here for the first time in the chapter also hints that it is the Christian, circumcised in the heart by God’s Spirit, who is the “true” Jew (v. 29).”
NICNT

Circumcision = Peritome – “from peritemno, to cut around, circumcise. Refers to circumcision or cutting off the foreskin. It also means the abstract in place of the concrete (Jews as opposed to the Gentiles).” (Lexical Aids to the New Testament: NASB Key Study Bible)

⁴⁰ Observe = Prasso “to make, perform in general; do good; but more commonly, do evil. Whenever the words prasso and poieo assume an ethical tinge, the inclination makes itself felt to use poieo in a good sense and prasso in an evil sense.” (Lexical Aids to the New Testament: NASB Key Study Bible)

⁴¹ Break the law = parabates – “transgressor of the law; used with reference to the imputation of sin so far as it is transgression of the known law, deviation from recognized truth. Willful and knowledgeable deviation.” (Lexical Aids to the New Testament: NASB Key Study Bible)

⁴² Not been circumcised = Akrobia – “from akros, the extreme, and buo or buzo, to fill up, plug, stop up, cover. The foreskin; uncircumcision. In the NT., and especially the Pauline writings, the word is never applied to moral and spiritual things. A state of being uncircumcised means to designate someone as outside of the promises.” (Lexical Aids to the New Testament: NASB Key Study Bible)

⁴³ Regarded = Logizomai – “derived from logos, reason, word, account. Actually, the verb lego means to put together with one’s mind, to count, to occupy oneself with reckonings or calculations. In the NT the present in a passive sense means to reckon, count. To count something to somebody means to reckon anything to a person, to put to his account.” (Lexical Aids to the New Testament: NASB Key Study Bible)

⁴⁴ Obeys the law = Teleo – “from telos, end, goal. To make an end or accomplishment, to complete anything, not merely to end it, but to bring it to perfection or its destined goal, to carry it through.” (Lexical Aids to the New Testament: NASB Key Study Bible)

⁴⁵ Condemn you = Krino – “to divide, separate, make a distinction, come to a decision.” (Lexical Aids to the New Testament: NASB Key Study Bible)

⁴⁶ Written code = Gramma – “that which is written, a letter of the alphabet, a book, letter. NT meanings: a letter or character of literal writing; a writing; a bill, an account; the letter of the law, i.e., the literal sense and outward ordinances of the law; an epistle. Denotes the law in it’s written form whereby the relation of the law to the man whom it concerns is the more inviolably established.” (Lexical Aids to the New Testament: NASB Key Study Bible)

- Understanding Circumcision⁴⁷ – most basically the physical medical procedure of circumcision is a reference to the removal of the foreskin of the male penis. Although circumcision was practiced around the globe in different people groups (though not the majority), it was particularly practiced in Semitic groups in the Middle East. The most recorded group was the ancient Egyptians. God set up circumcision as a religious symbol with Abraham (Gen 17) and therefore it is practiced today by the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Islam, & Christianity). The difference between this form of circumcision and most other groups is that most groups used it as a sign of entering into adulthood which meant circumcision to teens. The Semitic version (especially Hebrews) was infant circumcision from the start (8th day). Although that Egyptians practiced circumcision for the mark of purity and religious status as well, it was still a slightly different mindset. For the Jew it was a very specific contract statement with God and the covenant between them and Him.
- Why this symbol? – of all ‘visible’ marks of commitment why choose one that very few people see in a relatively prudish group of people? I think there are a couple of reasons, but allow the room for more important reasons that I have not thought of. Here’s my thoughts: 1.) it was performed on the males (not females) as the head of the tribes and people groups, so it was about marking the leaders. 2.) It was performed on the penis because the penis was involved in procreation to make more people. 3.) Due to the religious purity demands of not connecting with other people

⁴⁷ “Gen 17 remains as the sole biblical account of the origin of Israelite circumcision. It was integrated into the Mosaic system in connection with the Passover (Ex 12:44), and apparently continued throughout the O.T. (e.g. Je 9:25-26). In Gen 17 the divine covenant is set out first as a series of promises, personal, national, spiritual. When the covenant is, secondly, expressed in a sign, circumcision, it is this totality of divine promise which is symbolized and applied to the divinely nominated recipients. The rite signifies the gracious movement of God to man, and only derivatively, as we shall see, the consecration of man to God. While the nation walked in the wilderness under God’s displeasure (Nu 14:34), the covenant was, as it were, in suspended animation, and circumcision lapsed. Circumcision, therefore, is the token of that work of grace whereby God chooses out and marks men for his own. The covenant of circumcision operates on the principle of the spiritual union of the household in its head. From its inception, infant circumcision was the distinctive Israelite custom, not derived from Egyptian or other practice, and contrasting sharply with the puberty rites of other nations. Circumcision involves the idea of consecration to God, but not as its essence. Circumcision embodies and applies covenant promises and summons to a life of covenant obedience. The NT is unequivocal: without obedience, circumcision becomes uncircumcision (Rom 2:25-29); the outward sign fades into insignificance when compared with the realities of keeping the commandments, faith working by love, and a new creation. There is a circumcision of Christ, the putting off of the body and not only part of the flesh, a spiritual transaction not made with hands, a relation to Christ in his death and resurrection, sealed by the initiatory ordinance of the new covenant.” (New Bible Dictionary, Third Edition: Marshall, Millard, Packer & Wiseman.)

“God had instituted circumcision as a mark of His covenant with Abraham. No doubt this surgery was symbolic of the sinfulness of man that was passed from generation to generation. The very procreative organ needed to be cleaned of a covering. Circumcision was a symbol of God’s covenant, His blessings, His goodness, and His protection of His chosen people. But it was only an outward sign. Circumcision was, in fact, more a mark of judgment and obligation than of salvation and freedom. It was a constant reminder to Jews of their sinfulness and of their obligation to obey God’s law. Long before Paul’s day the rite of circumcision had become so shrouded in superstition that ancient rabbis formulated sayings such as ‘No circumcised Jewish man will see hell’ and ‘Circumcision saves us from hell.’ The Midrash includes the statement ‘god swore to Abraham that no one who was circumcised would be sent to hell. Abraham sits before the gate of hell and never allows any circumcised Israelite to enter.’ Yet, circumcision without obedience is of absolutely no value.” (MacArthur)

“Circumcision (2:25, lit., ‘a cutting around’) is a reference to the removal of the foreskin of the male penis. This was common practice among Semitic peoples, including the Hebrews. In the Old Testament, god introduced the custom as the sign of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 17:10-14, cf. Exod 12:48; Lev 12:3). The rite was a sign that one had entered the covenant community of Israel. Paul’s thoughts echoed Jeremiah’s words regarding a circumcision of the heart (Jer. 4:4; 9:25-26). It was the inward reality, not the outward sign, that counted most with God.” (New Bible Companion: Hughes and Laney, pg.612-613)

groups, the penis was marked so that it would be impossible to hide the fact that a man was a Jew when sexually engaging with a woman and it would 'out him' for accountability.

- What it became – when there is a physical and visible mark of someone being 'special' there is always the danger of it causing pride. Circumcision, being the main mark of a Jew, was not just considered a pride, but it began to be considered a mark of sinlessness. It gave the impression that since they were marked their sins would not be held accountable. There were Jewish writings that said circumcision saves people from hell (can't do there if you are marked), which is absolutely untrue.
- but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. – The point of the marking of circumcision was accountability. If you have the mark but don't follow the law, then why would you want the mark that says you have to keep the law? It doesn't make any sense. If you are breaking the law, it kind of ruins the whole point and that circumcision means nothing.
- So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? – If we follow that argument, Paul would say, then let's consider that Gentiles, who are not circumcised/marked, keep the law that is given by God on their hearts, and they are faithful to obey God, then wouldn't they be just as good as if they were circumcised? If obedience is what matters, then obedience is what matters, not physical markings.
- Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn⁴⁸ you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law⁴⁹ – In the same way if someone Jewish is physically circumcised AND keeps the law in obedience, they can stand in judgment on you who think your physical markings saves you but it doesn't. You have the outward sign but not the purity of heart and it profits you nothing.
- For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. – Paul strikes the final blow here: Because it's always been about the heart. All the actions from Abraham forward have been about having the faith to obey. The faith internally resulted in

⁴⁸ "The belief that the righteous would sit in judgment over the unrighteous was widespread. But the Jewish tradition naturally cast Jews in the role of the righteous and Gentiles in that of the unrighteous. Paul reverses this customary scheme and, continuing his argument from v. 26, asserts that "the uncircumcised person by nature who completes the law will judge²⁶ you [e.g., the Jew] who, though having the letter and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law." Whether Paul suggests that these righteous Gentiles will be appointed as judges by God²⁸ or that their obedience to the law itself will stand as accusatory evidence against the disobedient Jew is difficult to say. But the latter might be more likely in view of the parallel with Jesus' rebuke of the Jews who rejected him: "The men of Nineveh will arise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the south will arise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here" (Matt. 12:41–42; cf. Luke 11:31–32)." NICNT

⁴⁹ "We therefore conclude that Paul is again here citing God's standard of judgment apart from the gospel as a means of erasing the distinction at this point between Jew and Gentile. Paul is not pointing the way to salvation but is showing Jews that their position, despite their covenant privileges, is essentially no different from that of the Gentiles: disobedience brings condemnation; obedience brings salvation. Paul's way of putting the matter in this context could, of course, suggest that there actually are people who meet this requirement for salvation; but his later argument quickly disabuses us of any such idea (cf. 3:9, 20)." NICNT

obedience externally and that was what God was looking for, a heart loyal to His. Therefore, what God always wanted in His chosen people, the Jews, was someone whose heart was knitted to His and obedience was their way of life. It was not about who could cut off more skin, it was whose heart was right.

- But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit,⁵⁰ not by the letter⁵¹ – A true Jew is one whose heart is connected to God and obedient in this life. Any marking that ultimately matters is going to be a mark on the heart not on the skin. And we know that human beings alone cannot do this but need help from the Holy Spirit to have a heart change. It's never going to come from an external code like the Mosaic law demanding it. Demanding something that someone cannot do is not an effective law. But the Holy Spirit's presence (made available due to Christ's work on the cross) can. This was not the first time the Jews heard about the internal heart markings. Jeremiah talked about circumcision of the heart in chapter 4 and 9 (4:4; 9:25-26).
- Deut 10:16 *"Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer."*
- His praise is not from man but from God⁵² - When someone is truly the Lord's and committed to Him, others can see it perhaps, but the one that needs to see it is God. What other people are impressed with (e.g. often external physical markings) God sees beyond. When someone is honestly submitted to God, He knows, and He will give the words, 'well done, good and faithful servant.'

Conclusion

- How this ties in to breakthrough for us today – We have to keep shaking off the religiosity and dig into true faith and relationship with God. Some of us may be stuck because we are doing Christianity wrong. We are treating it like a religion – a

⁵⁰ "...those who have God's law written on their hearts by the spirit...it is clear that he is talking about Gentiles who have become Christians." (cf. 2 Cor 3:1-6). NT Wright, Romans for Everyone.

"The 'letter/spirit' contrast Paul uses here has played a prominent role in church history, where it was often applied to interpretation: the 'letter' denoting the literal, surface meaning of a text and the 'spirit' its deeper, allegorical sense. Paul, however, never uses the contrast with this application. As we have seen (see v. 27), Paul uses 'letter' to refer to the law of Moses 'as written.' In the current context, because of its proximity to 'heart' and apparent contrast with 'manifest,' some interpreters think that 'spirit' might refer to the inner aspect of the human being. But the immediate contrast here is with 'letter'; and this suggests that 'spirit,' like 'letter,' refers to a God-given entity. Thus, as in the other Pauline 'letter/spirit' passages (Rom. 7:6; 2 Cor. 3:6-7), 'spirit' should be capitalized: it refers to God's Holy Spirit. Paul's 'letter'/'Spirit' contrast is a salvation-historical one, 'letter' describing the past era in which God's law through Moses played a central role and 'Spirit' summing up the new era in which God's Spirit is poured out in eschatological fullness and power. It is only the circumcision 'in the Spirit'⁴⁵ that ultimately counts." NICNT

⁵¹ "...circumcision of the heart, that strange internal operation spoken of originally by Israel's scriptures themselves (Dt 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4). The prophets had spoken (Jer 31:33; 32:39-40; Eze 11:19; 36:26-27) of God's new work in people's hearts; this, it seems is what Paul has in mind. He is talking, in traditional Jewish language, about the renewal of the covenant, and claiming that it has taken place in and through God's spirit." NT Wright, Romans for Everyone.

⁵² "Having described 'the Jew' and 'the circumcised person' in terms not of ethnic background and physical marking but of the state of the heart, he declares that such a person gets 'praise' not from other human beings but from God. The point is this., The Hebrew name 'Judah' from which the word 'Jew' derives, actually means 'praise' (Gen 29:35; 49:8). Despite the fact that Paul is writing in Greek, where the point doesn't work, he is thinking in Hebrew. If it's 'praise' you want, he says – if you want the name that says you can lift up your head and claim your special dignity – then don't look for it from other human being, by boasting of your ethnic status as 'Jew'. Get it from God, when God writes his law on your heart by the spirit." NT Wright, Romans for Everyone

system by which we become a better person or a series of rules to follow so God will like us. But it's not. It's a dynamic, living relationship with God.

- Next week – Paul leaves no room for not taking personal responsibility for our faith walk.