



6.
**'Bibles, baptism & being born
again'**
Romans 2.17-29

Background

We're all inveterate 'wrigglers'! Paul, however, is careful always to allow no real 'wriggle-room' for anyone. That's what you're seeing here in these verses, as he insists that everyone needs Jesus: see how regular that note is through this early part of the letter – '*everyone*' (1.16), '*each person*' (2.6), '*every human being*' (2.9), and '*everyone*' (2.10).

The depravity of humankind was laid bare in 1.18-32, but he recognised that there are many good, clean-living people who abhor such depravity and who presume that because they are (at least *relatively*) good, they'll be OK come judgment day. In 2.1-16 Paul, however, knocked that line of thinking on the head.

But there are still those seeking some 'wriggle-room'! If it's not enough to be respectably good, surely the fact that you're religiously 'kosher' will swing things in your favour! Isn't '*religion*' your trump card, in other words? Doesn't the fact that you believe in God and have all the credentials of a Christian life – doesn't that fact suffice come judgment day? Why bring Jesus into it? It's the fallacy of that which Paul proceeds in these next verses to address.

The passage has two main sections. Paul underlines, first of all (vv.17-24), that having the 'trappings' of the Christian faith is not the same as the truth of it being found in a person. The Jews prided themselves on their pedigree (the spiritual roots which they had in the 'fathers' of their faith), and on the privileges they enjoyed (a 'Bible' through which God's truth and God's law had been entrusted to them). Such an avowed 'profession' of faith, Paul argued, is useless if not matched by the corresponding *practice* of what's being professed.

In the second section (vv.24-29) he then demonstrates that a reliance on ritual can never be a substitute for relationship with Jesus. The sacraments don't have any magical powers any more than a ring by itself doesn't make you married. It's what you're like on the inside that counts, and what each and every one of us therefore needs is that work of the Spirit of God in regenerating power to make us new – from the inside out.

Read the whole passage again, and start with '**days**' (3), (4) and (7).

1) Monday 12th February – pedigree

Read [Romans 2.17-20](#)

“.. because you are instructed by the law ..” (Rom.2.18)

‘Pedigree’ doesn’t impress the Lord! That you were born into a Christian family, always tick the ‘Christian’ box in the census form, and have a Bible at home which you’ve read and prize – none of that will save you. You still need Jesus as much as anyone else!

How can you tell whether you are relying on the outward ‘trappings’ of a Christian faith or are truly saved and safe in prospect of God’s judgment?

If you know the Bible well and are able (and quick) to quote it easily does that convey to others a sense of your superiority? How might you avoid that?

Prayer: I’m grateful, Lord, for the privilege of having had Your Word so readily available: keep me from presuming upon such privilege, and drive me always to Jesus!

2) Tuesday 13th February – hypocrisy

Read [Romans 2.21-22](#)

“.. you, then, who teach others, do you teach yourself? ..” (Rom.2.21)

Your ability to guide and advise others as to what is right and wrong will count for nothing if you don’t take such teaching to heart yourself. Beware lest, having preached to others, you will be yourself disqualified for the prize ([1 Cor.9.26f](#)).

If even the apostle saw fit to put disciplines in place to ensure he ‘practised what he preached’, what disciplines might you similarly put in place?

You may not be formally recognised as a ‘preacher’, but in what ways and contexts are you found to be ‘preaching’ against certain actions or attitudes?

Prayer: Lord, speak to me that I may speak in living echoes of Your tone. May my heart overflow in kindling thought and glowing word, Your love to tell, Your praise to show.

3) Wednesday 14th February – blasphemy

Read [Romans 2.23-24](#)

“.. ‘God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you’ ..” (Rom.2.24)

It’s not only your own name and reputation that you tarnish when you fail to do what the Bible you preach requires: you also dishonour the Lord, tarnishing His name and confirming those around you in their disdain for His grace, which they so much need.

Read [James 1.19-27](#): what are the practical applications for us of what James says here about *doing* God’s Word rather than just being ‘hearers’ of it?

Read Psalm 73, especially [v.15](#): it's a slightly different context, certainly, but the principle is the same – how would you state the principle Asaph accepts?

In what ways do you see in contemporary Scotland “God’s name” being “blasphemed among the Gentiles *because of you*”?

Read [Acts 19.1-20](#): far from being ‘blasphemed among the Gentiles’ the name of the Lord was ‘held in high honour’ (v.17) – what lessons might we learn from this narrative to ensure the Lord’s name is thus honoured among ourselves?

Prayer: *May the words of my mouth, the meditations of my heart, and the deeds of my daily living be all alike pleasing in Your sight, O Lord, and honouring to Your Name.*

4) Thursday 15th February – sacraments

Read [Romans 2.25](#)

“.. you have become as though you had not been circumcised ..” (Rom.2.25)

The sacraments aren’t magic. Baptism doesn’t make you a Christian: communion doesn’t bring you forgiveness. They’re signs of something God has done – and if not matched by the reality to which they point, they’re without any value and .. pointless!

Circumcision and the Passover as the two Old Testament sacraments are matched by, and said to correspond to, the two New Testament sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper (communion): why does the Lord give these sacraments to His people?

In what ways do the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper ‘have value’ for the believer?

Is enough teaching given on the sacraments of baptism and communion?

We all break God’s holy law – so to what is Paul pointing when he says that “if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised”?

Prayer: *I need You every hour, please stay near by; temptations lose their power when You are nigh. I need You every hour, teach me Your will, and Your rich promises in me fulfil.*

5) Friday 16th February – obedience

Read [Romans 2.26-27](#)

“.. even though you have the written code and circumcision ..” (Rom.2.27)

What may be listed on your spiritual CV is less significant than what may be learned from your daily behaviour. Your obedience to His Word, far more than your baptism or your Bible knowledge, is the truer measure of the lordship of Jesus in your life.

'Jesus is Lord' is the church's earliest credal confession: how did you come to the point where you were glad to own His lordship in your life?

What is distinctive in your life and living such that friends and neighbours would recognise that Jesus is truly Lord in your heart and life?

Prayer: *O Spirit of God, come afresh upon me today that my attitudes, speech, conduct and relationships shall all alike bear witness to Jesus as the risen, living Lord!*

6) Saturday 17th February – whitewashing

Read [Romans 2.28-29](#)

".. a person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly .." (Rom.2.28)

The mere *form* of godliness doesn't count so much as the *power* of godliness. The life of God is lived from the inside out. Whitewashing the walls of our heart with religious correctness doesn't wash with God and doesn't change the spiritual corruption within.

What Paul writes here echoes what Jesus Himself taught ([Matt.15.19](#)): how can you best 'guard your heart' ([Prov.4.23](#))?

What steps (if any) should a church's leaders take to ensure that only those in whom there has been that inward change are admitted as members?

Prayer: *Lord, purify my heart, cleanse me from within and make me holy. Purify my heart, cleanse me from my sin, deep within. Let me be as gold, pure gold.*

7) Sunday 18th February – regeneration

Read [Romans 2.29](#)

".. circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit .." (Rom.2.29)

Heart surgery is central to the gospel message. We need it. He effects it. The work of God's Spirit whereby He replaces our 'heart of stone' with 'a heart of flesh' is the great miracle of new birth. No one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.

How does God effect that 'circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit' in our lives, and how did that happen in your life?

What does Paul mean by contrasting the work of the Spirit with 'the written code'?

In his book *'The Soul Winner'* there's a chapter entitled, 'How to Raise the Dead': if you'd written that chapter what would you be saying?

Paul has a play on words here, in that the root of the word 'Jew' means 'praise' (see [Gen.29.35](#)): in what ways is your life characterised by praise?

Prayer: *I will exalt You, my God the King: I will praise Your name for ever and ever. May my whole life, Lord Jesus, be a constant sacrifice of praise, glorifying Your holy name.*