

Facilitator Notes for *Set Free!* – A Study in Romans  
Lesson 4 – **Practice with a Purpose** – Romans 2:17 - 3:8

**PLEASE DON'T READ THESE NOTES UNTIL YOU HAVE COMPLETED YOUR LESSON.  
HEARING GOD FOR YOURSELF IS WAY BETTER THAN MY COMMENTS!**

## Questions

Read **Romans 2:17-24** in both the NIV and NLT versions.

The Jewish people were the "religious" people of Paul's day in that they knew the truth about God and prided themselves in the practice of their religious traditions. Although Paul's comments are addressed specifically to the Jews, he is speaking of all religious people – anyone who knows about God and actively practices their faith in some way. *Religious*, for our purposes in this lesson, is neither a positive or negative term; it simply means someone who practices their faith in an particular denomination, tradition or church.

1. How did the Jews of Paul's day view themselves and why were they confident that they had a good relationship with God (2:17-20)?

The Jews saw themselves as God's chosen people, different and separate from Gentiles. God's law was given to them (through Moses on Mt. Sinai) and they were proud of their special relationship to God. Because they possessed God's law, they felt they knew God's will and knew right from wrong. Because they knew and were raised by the law, they felt they had the truth and therefore were capable of being a "guide for the blind and a light for those in the dark" – able to teach the Gentiles or those who did not know the one, true God. They saw themselves as an "instructor of the foolish and a teacher of infants" (probably meaning spiritual "babies" or converts to Judaism) because in the God's law they complete knowledge and truth.

- ♥ What are some specific advantages that you think your religious/spiritual tradition gives you? Disadvantages?
- ♥ What are you most grateful for from your religious/spiritual heritage? Least grateful?
- ♥ What are some specific things that you value from your current religious/spiritual **tradition** and **practices**? Why are these things important to you? How do you think God views them?

2. What point is Paul making by asking the list of questions in 2:21-23?

Paul is not denying that the Jews are God's chosen people or that they are special because God's law was given to them. His point in these verses is that they don't live up to their knowledge and they do not practice what they preach. The questions he asks are meant to draw attention to their inconsistencies and to reveal that knowing the truth is not enough; one must also live the truth that they know.

- ♥ Re-read 2:17-24, substituting *Christian* for *Jew* and *God's Word* for *law* (or your church/denomination for *Jew* and *church doctrine* for *law*). What are some questions that could be asked of a contemporary Christian that would reveal inconsistencies between **word** and **deed**?

Contemporary Christians may know God's Word well (or what their church teaches), but we, too, do not always live up to what we know. Jesus even went a step further in The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). He said that even doing what is right is not enough; we need to do what is right with the right heart motives. Our heart motives reveal who we really are.

- ♥ Is Paul implying that a person's religious heritage, knowledge and practices have no value? Why or why not?

Paul still sees value in our religious heritage and practices, but his point is that no one practices perfectly their religion. Even when we know what is truth and right, we are not capable in ourselves to always live according to what we know in our head. He is pointing this out to show that everyone, including the religious person who knows God and God's Word, needs God's salvation offered through Jesus Christ.

- ♥ What are some false assumptions people make about gaining God's favor?

3. What relationship do you see between what Paul is saying about religious people **2:21-23** and what he says about moral people in **2:1-3**?

Paul uses the same argument to reveal a double standard. If we are able to judge others, then we should be able to judge ourselves and if we teach others, we should be able to teach ourselves. If we set ourselves up as judges or teachers (those that know the truth), we have no excuse for not judging and teaching ourselves! We can't claim ignorance about our own behavior and sinful condition when we are able to spot the wrong in other people's lives. When we continue to judge or teach others about the truth, without living it ourselves, we show that we are hypocrites.

- ♥ On a scale of 1 to 10, how well do you think you live up to the requirements of your religious beliefs?
- ♥ How could a person be very religious and yet be lacking a real relationship with God?
- ♥ Why is knowing truth about God and even practicing your religion not enough in God's eyes?

4. What is the tragic consequence when a person does not "practice what they preach" (**2:24**)?

The world or non-Christians blaspheme God (get down on; speak irreverently about; make fun of) Why does our hypocrisy cause God to get the "bad rap"?

People jump to the conclusion that God is who we portray him to be by the way we live. They reason that if God can't help us live up to the standards he sets, then he must not be much of a God. Just as children are a reflection on their parents and the family name (whether or not the parents are to blame), so a religious person is a reflection on the God they worship.

- ♥ Why is it our **actions** and not our **words** that reveal what we really believe? Does this mean our words are not important? Why or why not?

Words are important and have their place in instruction and teaching, but it is interesting to note that if someone says they believe, etc., actions are needed to prove the words. However, a person may not say anything at all and still powerfully teach or instruct through only their actions and the way they live their life.

- ♥ If your eternal destiny was decided on the **quality** of your religious/spiritual life, how would you fare?
- ♥ How has religious hypocrisy hurt the cause of Christ in our day?

Read **Romans 2:25-29**.

*Circumcision* was instituted by God through Abraham as a sign that Abraham and his descendants would be God's chosen people, a nation through which God would bless all the people of the earth (**Gen. 17:1-14**). Circumcision of the Jewish male was required as a visible, physical sign of the covenant between God and his people and it was to be a continual reminder of God's promises. Any male not circumcised was to be "cut off from his people" (**Gen. 17:14**) and regarded as a covenant-breaker (**Ex. 22:48**). The Hebrew people came to take great pride in circumcision and it became a badge of their spiritual and national superiority. They viewed it as a guarantee of God's favor.

- ♥ What religious activities are we tempted to rely on as the basis of our justification before God?

5. What does Paul say is the relationship between *religious practices* and *obedience* (**2:25-27**)?

Religious practices (church attendance, baptism, the Lord's Supper, studying the Bible, witnessing, etc.) have no value and count for nothing unless there is obedience to God and what our rituals stand for. Our religious practices do not automatically make us what our disobedience proves we are not. There is no value of being born into a Christian family or church if our lives don't match our beliefs. Obedience (the way we live) is the proof of what we believe, not our religious practices.

- ♥ To apply Paul's argument to *Christian religious practices*, read **2:25-29** substituting *Christian* for *Jew* and *baptism* for *circumcision*. Would you agree with these statements? Why or why not?
- ♥ Is Paul advising that religious rituals have no value and should be done away with? Why or why not?

- ♥ What are some signs, symbols or rituals that are worn, displayed or performed that hold special meaning for Christians today? What is an example of people not living up to these symbols or rituals?

6. How did Paul redefine what it means to be a Jew, one of God's chosen people (2:26-29)?

A real Jew (God's chosen and favored one) is not one who is just circumcised (or belonging to a family of a circumcised Jew), but rather one (even a Gentile) who keeps and obeys God's law. 2:26-27 in the NLT is a good explanation of what Paul is pointing out:

26 And if the Gentiles obey God's law, won't God give them all the rights and honors of being his own people? 27 In fact, uncircumcised Gentiles who keep God's law will be much better off than you Jews who are circumcised and know so much about God's law but don't obey it.

- ♥ How could a person be outwardly a Christian and inwardly something else?
- ♥ What will give meaning to your outward religious performance?
- ♥ When did your faith become more than ritual?

7. Paul speaks of two different circumcisions. List all the differences you see between these two types of circumcision (2:28-29).

Old Circumcision	New Circumcision
outward physical of the body by the law	inward spiritual of the heart by the Spirit

8. What are some things that Paul valued over the "old circumcision" (Philippians 3:4-11)?

Paul used to believe in and live by the old circumcision. He was a Pharisee, who demanded strictest obedience to the Jewish law, but he came to see all of his old life as worthless because of what Jesus Christ did for him. Now, he values:

**intimately knowing Christ his Lord;**

being "right with God" through faith in Christ and not of his own efforts;

experiencing the same spiritual power in his own life that raised Christ from the dead;

suffering with and for Christ is necessary;

someday experiencing the resurrection from the dead to live with Christ forever.

- ♥ What kind of value do you put on the things that Paul was striving for in his own life? Are these things more important than your outward religious practices? Why or why not?
- ♥ Why do you do the religious things that you do? Can you think of some ways you could test what your motives are for participating in these religious practices?

9. What does it mean to have a circumcised heart (2:29)? How is it demonstrated?

1 Corinthians 7:19	a heart that obeys God's commandments
Galatians 5:6	a heart that has faith in God and expresses itself in love for God and others
Deuteronomy 30:6	loving God with all your heart and soul
Psalms 51:17	a broken and repentant heart ; a heart that is sorry and willing to change when we sin

- ♥ Which of the above "heart conditions" would you like to see most in your life? Why?
- ♥ Circumcision of the heart is "by the Spirit" (2:29). What is the Spirit's role in creating the "heart conditions" listed above? What can you do to cooperate with the Spirit's work in your heart?

We don't belong to God because of outward religious practices or an outward physical mark or ritual like circumcision (or baptism, etc.). We belong to God because we accept what Jesus did for us (dying in our place) by faith. If we believe, the Holy Spirit comes to live in us permanently (not a visitation, but a habitation!) and his life-giving power begins to change us from the inside out

(Col. 2:11). We can cooperate with the Spirit's work in our heart by choosing to die (saying no) to our old sin nature and yielding ourselves to His work in our heart as we develop an intimate relationship with him. (We will learn more about this in Romans 8.)

- ♥ How have you sensed the Spirit at work in your heart? How can you tell when he is working in you?

Read **Romans 3:1-8**.

The coming of Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah changed everything in the first century, especially for the faithful Jew. Paul realizes that the *gospel* he preaches is a radical, new truth. In this letter to the Romans, he redefines what it means to be a Jew (2:26-29), and he teaches that *all people are sinners in need of God's salvation*, even "good, moral" people (2:1-16) as well as "religious" people (including the Jews) (2:17-29). In preaching this gospel, Paul, like a good teacher, anticipates *arguments* and *objections* to what he has taught. In 3:1-8, he states these anticipated objections as questions, which he briefly answers. (Further in-depth answers come later in his letter.)

10. Fill in the chart below, summarizing in your own words, the questions Paul raises as well as his answers to these "objections". (Both the NIV and NLT versions will be helpful.)

Questions	Answers
3:1 What's the advantage of being a Jew and what is the value of circumcision?	3:2 There are many advantages of being a Jew. Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God – God revealing himself to his creation. They have been the custodians of God's truth for all people.
3:3 What about Jews that have been unfaithful to what God has called them to be? Will God change his mind or break his promises because of them?	3:4 No, God is always faithful and true to his promises. His faithfulness does not, in any way, depend on people's behavior. Even if we are unfaithful or break our promises, God never will. God's plan for all people remains unchanged.
3:5 If God's faithfulness is not dependent on my faithfulness, then why should I be faithful? If my sinfulness makes God look good, then why should I be punished? I'm actually helping God out!	3:6 If God does not judge sin, he is not fair or just and is not qualified to be the judge of the world. To NOT judge sin would make God unfair and unjust – and not God!
3:7-8 Why would God judge and condemn me if my dishonesty (sin) makes his honesty (sinlessness) look all the better! Why not sin all the more so that more of "making God look good" will result?	3:8b <b>Their condemnation is deserved.</b> Paul doesn't even want to answer this ridiculous argument. Our sin nature would rather <u>rationalize</u> than <u>repent</u> .

- ♥ What objections or questions do people today raise to resist the message of the gospel?

## Response

Paul's continuing theme in these opening chapters of Romans is that *no one is good enough on their own* and that *everyone needs what Jesus offers*. In light of this theme, consider the following questions.

- ♥ Can your religious practices, even if they are good and right, save you from the penalty of your own sin? Why or why not?
- ♥ Why is it **not enough** to be a *good moral person* (choosing right over wrong) or a *good religious person* (sincerely practicing your faith), even if these things result in God's blessings your life?
- ♥ How can what you have learned in this lesson help you share the good news of Jesus with a respectable, religious person who is trusting in their religious practices to gain favor with God?

BELOW IS THE SUPPLEMENTARY SCRIPTURE FOR THIS LESSON THAT CAN BE PRINTED OUT FOR SMALL GROUP TIME.

## NIV

**Philippians 3:4** though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: **5** circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; **6** as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. **7** But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. **8** What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ **9** and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. **10** I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, **11** and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

**1Corinthians 7:19** Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts.

**Galatians 5:6** For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

**Deuteronomy 30:6** The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.

**Psalms 51:17** The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

## NLT

**Philippians 3:4** Yet I could have confidence in myself if anyone could. If others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more! **5** For I was circumcised when I was eight days old, having been born into a pure-blooded Jewish family that is a branch of the tribe of Benjamin. So I am a real Jew if there ever was one! What's more, I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. **6** And zealous? Yes, in fact, I harshly persecuted the church. And I obeyed the Jewish law so carefully that I was never accused of any fault. **7** I once thought all these things were so very important, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. **8** Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the priceless gain of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I may have Christ **9** and become one with him. I no longer count on my own goodness or my ability to obey God's law, but I trust Christ to save me. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith. **10** As a result, I can really know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I can learn what it means to suffer with him, sharing in his death, **11** so that, somehow, I can experience the resurrection from the dead!

**1Corinthians 7:19** For it makes no difference whether or not a man has been circumcised. The important thing is to keep God's commandments.

**Galatians 5:6** For when we place our faith in Christ Jesus, it makes no difference to God whether we are circumcised or not circumcised. What is important is faith expressing itself in love.

**Deuteronomy 30:6** "The LORD your God will cleanse your heart and the hearts of all your descendants so that you will love him with all your heart and soul, and so you may live!

**Psalms 51:17** The sacrifice you want is a broken spirit. A broken and repentant heart, O God, you will not despise.