



Lesson 4 ~ Practice with a Purpose

Romans 2:17-3:8

Discussion Starter

- What do you remember most about your religious training as you were growing up?

Introduction

Paul continues to prove his case that *the gospel is for all people – and all people need the gospel*. In **Lesson 2** we saw that secular, non-religious people (people who do not know God or give him any attention) cannot claim **innocence** before God because of their **ignorance** of him and in **Lesson 3** we discovered why being a moral person (knowing right from wrong and trying to do the right thing) is not good enough when measured against God's perfect standard.

In this lesson, Paul continues his critique of the human race, zeroing in this time on the Jewish

people because they were the *religious people* of Paul's day who were relying on their religious heritage to gain favor with God.

Although Paul speaks specifically to those practicing the Jewish faith, we today can find application for his words realizing that Paul's arguments can be applied to anyone who thinks their **religious heritage, knowledge or practices** will give them right standing before God. All, even the very religious, still fall short of God's perfect standard and all need what the Good News offers.

Preparation

1. Before you read **Romans 2:17-3:8**, ask God to You may want to make the following prayer your own:

Triune God – Father, Son and Spirit,

I admit that I cannot understand the truth found in God's Word with only my mind.

I agree that spiritual truth has to be understood with my heart as well as my head.

So I ask You to give me spiritual understanding as I do this lesson.

*I pray that You would enable me to see, hear and understand,
with my spirit, all that You want to teach me.*

I ask this in the powerful name of Father, Son and Spirit.

Amen

2. Read **Romans 2:17-3:8** slowly and thoughtfully. As you read and reread, **underline or highlight** any verses, phrases or words that are meaningful to you. Put a **question mark** beside anything you don't understand. Put a ✓ beside anything you would like more information about.

You may also want to read the Scripture in another translation. The Scripture handouts for these lessons contain the *New International Version (NIV)* and the *New Living Translation (NLT)*. The questions are phrased to be answered from **either** of these versions. Other translations and paraphrases should only be used as supplementary texts to help your understanding.

3. Sum up the Scripture passage for this lesson in a short sentence, phrase or title.

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

Why does **our** hypocrisy cause **God** to get the "bad rap"?

- ♥ 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?
- ♥ 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**)?

- ♥ 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**)?

- ♥ 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

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

- ♥ 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	
Galatians 5:6	
Deuteronomy 30:6	
Psalms 51:17	

- ♥ 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?
- ♥ 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	3:2
3:3	3:4
3:5	3:6
3:7-8	3:8b

- ♥ 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?