

REMNANT CHURCH SERMON NOTES – ROMANS 2: 17-29
PREACHED ON NOVEMBER 23, 2025 BY REV. B.B. ANUM-HIGHER

17 Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and boast in God; 18 if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; 19 if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, 20 an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of little children, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth— 21 you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? 22 You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? 23 You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? 24 As it is written: “God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.” 25 Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. 26 So then, if those who are not circumcised keep the law’s requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? 27 The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker. 28 A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. 29 No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person’s praise is not from other people, but from God.

➤ **INTRODUCTION**

- We will conclude our study of Romans, chapter 2, today. Paul continues to make his case that self-righteousness is no Christianity. The self-righteous Jew, or the self-righteous Christian, is no different than the pagan.
- One of the unique aspects of the Bible is its ability to speak to every generation, making it a contemporary book. When I first understood this part of Romans, I immediately knew that Apostle Paul had no other person in mind when he wrote this letter but me. It spoke to my condition, my surface religion, my hypocrisy, my self-righteousness, my false understanding of the doctrine of election, and my spiritual blindness.
- About two weeks ago, I mentioned to you how the devil makes sin look attractive for many people, and after they have fallen for this deception, their sin finally destroys them. I used the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15 to make that point. Sin always deceives. When the prodigal son left home, he had high hopes of being free to do as he pleased. He no longer had to obey his father, he thought. He enjoyed the pleasures sin brings, but only for a time. Sin doesn’t fulfill all the promises it offers. Sooner or later, reality caught up with him after he had spent all that he had received from his father.
- The devil has so many weapons in his weaponry that he uses to rule the world and also attack the believers. Satan uses false church leaders to mislead many.

(Matthew 7:15-16, Matthew 24:4-5). Satan is okay if a group of people will meet several times a week in the name of a church, so long as no true spiritual activities take place when they meet. Satan is fine with superficial or surface religion, with liberal Christianity and formal religion, because it does not save.

- Another weapon Satan uses to keep people in their unbelief is complacency. Complacency occurs when people develop a sense of contentment regarding the state of things, leading them to become easily self-satisfied. They will give excuses for why they are not growing spiritually or why things should continue to progress as they are. It is tough to teach a complacent person; they are not just teachable because they think that they are far better than others. They have their eyes on the sins of others and are blind to their own many sins.
- Satan also deceives the self-righteous to believe that it is okay to dissociate appearance from reality. Paul is going to show us what the false church, or false Christian, is in our text today.
- It is my prayer that God will speak from heaven to us so that we will be different in this city of Pella, in Iowa and wherever the Lord sends us. It is also my prayer that we will not forget that God is not only going to judge our actions but also our motives, thoughts, desires, hearts, and every aspect of our lives.

➤ **BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE TEXT.**

- Paul has been telling the Jewish members in the church at Rome that God has no favorites when it comes to His judgment against sin and the sinner. In Romans 1:18, he wrote that **"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness."**
- However, this teaching has not been understood by the Jews or they rejected it because they believed that they were a special group of people. Out of all the tribes, nations, and people in the world, God set His affection on them by calling their ancestor Abraham to be his beloved child. God instructed Abraham to circumcise their male children. Later, God, through Moses, gave them the Ten Commandments, ordered them to perform temple worship, and imposed many other sacrifices and laws that set them apart from the rest of the world.
- However, with time, they boasted in their name, Jew, and heritage. They lost the meaning of why God called them out of all the people in the world and blessed them with the Ten Commandments, circumcision, and many other sacrifices. They were misled by the many sacrifices they were involved in and thought that God would never bring His wrath on them, regardless of how they lived, because they were God's chosen and special people. They boasted that God called them to teach the world about morality, and yet they committed the same sins they warned others not to do, simply because they thought that God would not touch them.

- ✓ **Why did God choose them and not any other tribes? Was it because of their great number, military power, or beauty? Why did He give them the sacrifices to observe? Was it because God takes pleasure in externals?**
- **They were chosen to be missionaries to the world, to the Gentiles.**
- In Genesis 12:3, God told Abraham that all the nations of the world would be blessed through the Jews. The Savior of the world would come from them, and they were called to tell the rest of the world about God through their way of life. While the rest of the world were engaged in idol worship, the Jews were called to be different by loving the Lord with all their heart and with all their soul and with all their strength (Deuteronomy 6:5). They were given the Ten Commandments in a written form, on tablets of stone, to tell them about God's standard of living and judgment. At no time in their history did God tell them that they were at liberty to live any life and still be blessed by Him and escape His judgment just because they were Jews.
- Additionally, God through Moses communicated to them that obedience to God is what actually defines the true Jew. Anyone, whether they identify as Jews or not, will face His judgment when they do not repent of their sins. This is what God told them in Deuteronomy 7.

7 The Lord did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. 9 Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; He is the faithful God, keeping His covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love Him and keep His commandments. 10 But those who hate Him He will repay to their face by destruction; He will not be slow to repay to their face those who hate Him. 11 Therefore, take care to follow the commands, decrees, and laws I give you today. Deuteronomy 7:7-11.

- In our text, Paul refuted the beliefs of the Jews that they could warn others about their sins and yet live a sinful life just because they are Jews, special people.

17 Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and boast in God; 18 if you know His will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; 19 if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, 20 an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of little children, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth— 21 you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? 22 You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? 23 You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? ROMANS 2:17-23.

- Paul is saying to his Jewish brothers, Listen, you will not be spared God's wrath because you don't obey your own sermons and lessons. For example, you tell others not to steal, but some of you are involved in practices that can be described as stealing. You preach against adultery, but you lust after other

people's wives. You preach against idol worship, but here you are doing the same things. This is false religion. This is a message for us to take seriously because we could easily be trapped in a false Christianity like the Jews.

➤ **SO, HOW DOES A FALSE CHRISTIANITY LOOK LIKE?**

1. IT IS INTERESTED PRIMARILY IN NAME ONLY. VERSE 17.

- Paul, the writer of this letter, was himself a Jew who took great pride in his Jewish heritage. He lays out his Jewish credentials in [Philippians 3:5–6](#): “**If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: 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.**” The fact that he was circumcised on the eighth day means that his parents followed the commandment God gave to Abraham in [Genesis 17:2](#).
- However, boasting about their name Jew, and heritage was not God’s purpose for choosing them as His people. He chose them for the purpose of producing the Messiah He promised in the Garden of Eden after the Fall ([Genesis 3](#)). God’s desire for Israel was that they would go and teach others about Him. Israel was to be a nation of priests, prophets, and missionaries to the nations of the world. God’s intent was for Israel to be a distinct people, a nation that pointed others towards God and His promised provision of a Redeemer, Messiah, and Savior. ([Genesis 12:1-3](#)).
- **How does this verse speak to us?**
- Christians can easily fall into the same trap by being Christians in name only. I used to take pride in my Pentecostal and charismatic upbringing, which included praying long prayers, fasting for several days, speaking in tongues, and other spiritual practices. It became worse after I was introduced to the Reformed faith. Knowing that I am an elect of God, having a detailed understanding of Scripture, memorizing the catechisms, creeds, and confessions, etc., made me act like the Jews. I used to enjoy debates on Facebook, primarily to showcase my understanding of Scripture and knowledge of evangelical terms and doctrines. I took only a theoretical interest in and intellectual belief in the truth. I was interested in arguing and discussing it, but not applying it to my life, showing no evidence of spiritual fruit.
- False Christianity always feeds pride. However, Christianity is not a religion for appearance only. Christianity is a religion that humbles the worshipers. Listen to God speak to the Israelites about what He wants to see in His followers.

Thus says the Lord: “Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool; what is the house that you would build for Me, and what is the place of My rest? 2 All these things My hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the Lord. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at My word. [Isaiah 66:1-2](#).

- **How do you know who the true believers are?** They are humble people; they have no room for pride. They hear God's Word and tremble at what it says to them. The Word reveals their many sins, which lead to repentance and conversion. They recognize their spiritual poverty before God, so they hunger and thirst for righteousness.

3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Matthew 5:3,6.

- Why did God give the Israelites the Ten Commandments? Was it to make them proud? No. It is to reveal their sins to them in order to humble them.

19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. 20 Therefore, no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin. Romans 3: 19-20.

2. IT IS INTERESTED IN KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH ONLY. VERSE 18.

- The Jews also boasted about God giving them the Ten Commandments, the Five Books of the Bible, the Holy Sacrifices, etc. They were blessed with great teachers, priests, kings, and prophets. Over time, these privileges hindered their worship, and they took pride in their knowledge and ability to teach others.
- As I have stated above, those of us, especially in the Reformed faith and those who are teachers, could easily be trapped in the same deception, thinking that we are excellent Christians because we possess great knowledge of Holy Scripture. Pastors, Sunday school teachers, and Christian school educators often prepare academically to instruct others in the truth, but they usually fail to realize that we must first preach to ourselves, believe what we have prepared to teach others, and obey the same principles before we can impact the lives of others. It is an empty message when we don't believe or obey what we teach.
- The devil knows the Scriptures, can quote them, yet it never converts him. Knowledge, memorizing, and quoting of Scripture while they are necessary for the Christian, are not an indication of true Christianity. The devil is busy deceiving people to keep their religion in their minds without it penetrating their hearts. This leads to a form of godliness that denies its power to transform.

3. IT IS INTERESTED IN CEREMONIES OR RITUALS ONLY. VERSES 25, 28 & 29.

- The Jews also boasted about their circumcision. The word circumcise literally means “to cut around.” As a religious rite, circumcision was required of all of Abraham's descendants as a sign of the covenant God made with him (Genesis 17:9–14; Acts 7:8). The Mosaic Law repeated the requirement (Leviticus 12:2–3).
- However, circumcision became a ritual and only a form of godliness to the Jews without the reality behind it. They forgot to realize that God had a reason for instructing them to do that. Paul tells them that God did not give them the rituals,

such as circumcision, just because He loves externals. God's reason for giving them the external forms of worship was to instill holiness in the Jews and nothing else. The rituals were given to communicate a message to them that they were to live a particular way of life as God's people; they must be holy at all times.

- For example, the ultimate purpose of circumcision was spiritual, symbolizing as it did God's faithfulness to the Israelites through the covenant He made with them. Any external form of worship is meaningless if the worshiper is a habitual sinner. Moses told them **"Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn"** (Deuteronomy 10:16, 30:6).
- Jeremiah later adopts this imagery, warning the Israelites of his day, **"Circumcise yourselves to the Lord; remove the foreskin of your hearts, O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest my wrath go forth like fire, and burn with none to quench it, because of the evil of your deeds"** (Jeremiah 4:4, 9:25–26).
- In at least three passages in the Bible, Paul alludes to a circumcision of the heart, a spiritual circumcision. In Romans 2:28-29, Philippians 3:3, and Colossians 2:11, Paul discusses the concept of spiritual circumcision. This circumcision, rather than cutting off a small part of the flesh, is a cutting off of the fleshly nature. Colossians 2:11 especially illustrates this circumcision. **"In Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self-ruled by the flesh was put off when Christ circumcised you."** This circumcision is not done by human hands but by Christ. And it is not just males. All believers have experienced this circumcision of the heart by Christ.
- This is how Paul put it in our text.

25 Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. 26 So then, if those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? 27 The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker. 28 A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. 29 No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God. Romans 2:25-29.

- In the New Covenant, we also observe external forms of worship, such as church attendance, baptism, and the communion service, where we partake of the bread and drink the cup. We also sing hymns, offer our gifts, and make professions of faith, among other things. All these externals communicate one and only one message to us: be holy, be different, separate from sin.
- Therefore, performing all these external acts of worship without a determination to live a holy life, without loving the Lord with all our heart, is meaningless; it is nothing to God. We will hear the exact words from God to the Jews at the time of Isaiah.

11 “The multitude of your sacrifices— what are they to me?” says the Lord. 13 Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths, and convocations— I cannot bear your worthless assemblies. 15 When you spread out your hands in prayer, I hide my eyes from you; even when you offer many prayers. Isaiah 1: 11-15.

- God wants us to worship Him with our hearts, and everything we do must be done with our hearts (Deuteronomy 6: 4-6). **Proverbs 23:26 tells us, 26 My son, give me your heart and let your eyes delight in my ways.**
- How will you feel when someone you met at church proposes to marry you? He goes through all the formalities of marriage, but his words and actions show that he doesn't truly love you; he feels compelled to do everything he does. Even though he had no love, he went ahead and met with your family, friends, bought you an engagement ring, planned the marriage, signed the legal documents, and had the wedding ceremony. Will you be happy with someone who does everything for you, but without love? Most people will say no.
- God is not into formalities; He wants a loving relationship with His people because there is no life in ritualism, in surface religion, in liberal Christianity, because it is empty, heartless, and leads to hell.

➤ **WHY IS FALSE CHRISTIANITY SUCH AN EVIL THING?**

1. IT IS IDOLATRY TO WORSHIP GOD WITH EXTERNALS ONLY

- God has consistently rejected any worship of Him that is only outward in nature. God is a spirit, and His worshippers cannot worship Him any other way but in spirit. They must worship Him with their hearts. **John 4:24 tells us that “God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”**
- External worship is a suppression of the Truth about God that He is a spirit. We cannot choose how we want to worship God. At Remnant church, our worship and daily living are guided by the Regulative Principle of Worship. By this principle, we believe that God alone determines how He ought to be worshiped. In practice, we seek to do in corporate worship, family life, and our behavior only what is warranted in Scripture. We cannot worship a spiritual being externally.

2. GOD DEMANDS THE BEST FROM US IN WORSHIP

- The mission of the church is worship and mission. We are not only created to worship God, but also saved to give Him worship. What is the best thing we can give God in our worship? Is circumcision the best thing we can give God? No. Is baptism, getting into a pool and coming out, the best thing we can give to the creator of the universe? No. Is singing a couple of hymns every Sunday and attending two services on Sundays, the best thing we can give to God? No. Is

serving as a pastor, elder, deacon, Sunday School teacher, missionary, etc, the best thing you can give to God? Certainly not. What is the best thing believers can give to God?

- It is your heart, it is my heart, it is our hearts. We are spiritual beings in a body, and we must commune with God spiritually. The spirit in the believer sees, hears, and knows God. How do you express your love to God? Is it with rituals? No.

30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' Mark 12:30.

- Anything we do for God which does not involve our heart or is done with love is meaningless.
- **Who is the true Jew and what is the true circumcision? Paul says,**

28 A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. 29 No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God. Romans 2:28-29.

- **Who is the true believer?**
- The true believer is the man or woman who worships God with all his or her heart. The true believer is the man and woman who is not filled with doctrines in the head, but without holiness in daily living. The true believer is the man and woman who the Word of God has humbled, is teachable, and continues to hunger and thirst for righteousness.

3. FALSE CHRISTIANITY BLASPHEMES GOD'S NAME AMONG OTHERS

- Unknown to the Jews, their false and surface religion, which shows off in their hypocrisy, was being watched carefully by the Gentiles. Paul wrote,

21 you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? 22 You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? 23 You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? 24 As it is written: "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you." ROMANS 2:21-24.

- Like the Jews, pastors and Christian teachers can easily take an interest in teaching others, but never teach themselves, and are actually guilty of doing the very things we tell others not to do.
- James, the apostle, warns anyone who teaches Scripture, whether as a pastor, Christian school teacher, etc. to be prepared to receive a stricter judgment.

Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. James 3:1.

- Paul listed stealing, adultery, etc., as some of the sins the Jews asked others not to do, but they did them themselves. We are reminded to be mindful that non-believers are watching and judging Christianity by what they see in the lives of professing believers. The best translation of Scripture is what others see in the lives of believers, the spiritual fruits we bear, rather than what we say.

➤ APPLICATION

- Are you complacent and overconfident in your beliefs? Do you not see the need to examine yourself if you are a changed man, if you have truly repented of your sins, if you do the very things you condemn in others? Are you, by your actions, causing others to blaspheme God? If yes to any of these, then you are engaged in a false Christianity. False Christianity, or surface religion, is unbelief and a sign that you don't have the righteousness of God, regardless of how long you have been a member of a church.
- Jesus, John the Baptist, Paul, and the apostles did not ask the Jews who were involved in false religion to do anything other than to ask them to repent and believe. If you are here, watching us online or reading this sermon, and are engaged in name-only Christianity, which feeds your pride but you are unknowingly on your way to hell, I repeat the same words of Jesus to you: **Repent and believe.** Our text teaches us that none of us can rely solely on our profession of faith, baptism, church membership, Christian service, or circumcision to save us. We must undergo an inward change and cultivate a relationship with God.
- We must repent of our pride, complacency, and self-righteousness, and recognize that knowledge of Scripture without holiness in practice is insufficient. We must also believe that Jesus came to save sinners like us. Paul, a man deeply engaged in a false religion, an external form of religion, was transformed by Jesus into the man who later gave himself entirely to the Lord. He later learned that God only cares about the inward sign of true change and repentance, and not the many external forms of worship we bring Him that do not involve our hearts.
- You must also downplay the externals; you must break away from false Christianity, surface religion, and give more attention to spiritual things like obedience to God's Word. It is not enough to hear God's word; one must also apply the truth and be humbled by it. This will produce an inward change that eventually makes us look more like Jesus Christ.
- As I conclude, I invite all of us to examine ourselves to see if we are relying on outward things as evidence of our conversion, or if we have the inward reality of a new heart and life, for the only thing that avails before God is holiness. Without it, no one will see the Lord. How painful it will be for many to appear before God on the Day of Judgment and hear the words, I never knew you because what ultimately matters to God is whether we are born again, whether we have received the new nature, gotten the life of God in our souls, and have a new heart.