

Ignoring God's Truth Within Us

Teaching Tips

July 3, 2016

Bible Study Guide 5

Words You Should Know

A. Restest ([Romans 2:17](#)) *epanapauomai* (Gk.)—To rest on something; to settle.



B. Circumcision (v. 25) *peritome* (Gk.)—The removal of the foreskin, in conformity with God's standards for the Jewish males.

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—Matching Words with Actions. Many people talk about appreciating the world around them but do not demonstrate it. What causes such inconsistency? Paul insists that, while some people teach others how to obey the Law and live in ways consistent with God's creation, they do not obey the Law themselves or have it written on their hearts.

A. Read the Bible Background and Devotional Readings.

B. Complete Lesson 5 in the *Precepts For Living*® Personal Study Guide.

C. Reread the Focal Verses in a modern translation.

O—Open the Lesson

A. Open with prayer, including the Aim to Change.

B. Introduce today's lesson title.

C. Ask your students: "Have you ever intentionally ignored God's truth within you?" Allow volunteers to share their testimonies about those times.

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Have volunteers read the Focal Verses.

B. Use The People, Places, and Times; Background; and Search the Scriptures to help answer students' questions.

E—Explore the Meaning

A. Use the Discuss the Meaning, Lesson in Our Society, and Make It Happen sections.

B. Connect these sections to the Aim for Change and the Keep in Mind verse.

N—Next Steps for Application

A. Summarize the lesson.

B. Close with prayer.

Worship Guide

For the Superintendent or Teacher

Theme: Ignoring God's Truth Within Us

Song: "Create in Me a Clean Heart"

Devotional Reading: [1 Peter 1:13–23](#)



Ignoring God's Truth Within Us

Bible Background • [PSALM 104](#); [ROMANS 2:14–29](#)



Printed Text • [ROMANS 2:17–29](#) | **Devotional Reading** • [1 PETER 1:13–23](#)



Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: TELL what Paul reveals about the people who claim to follow God's Law while failing to keep it; RECOGNIZE the hypocrisy of claiming to belong to God while breaking God's Law; and IDENTIFY the hypocrisy in our beliefs and daily actions and ways to comply with God's Law.



In Focus

By the time Pastor Murphy had been at his new church for a few months, he had gotten to know two brothers who were influential in the church. They were multimillionaires and not very godly men. When one of the brothers died, the surviving brother went to the pastor and said, "Now Pastor, I know that you are going to be doing the funeral in a couple of days, and I also know that you want to build a brand new church. So I tell you what. Let me write you a nice, big check right now to pay for your new building, and I'm going to remind you that my brother's funeral is this weekend. When you talk about what a saint my brother was, I hope you remember who your friends are."

The pastor felt himself on the horns of a dilemma. He spent a lot of the week deep in thought about what he would say. When the time came for the funeral, Pastor Murphy got up to do the eulogy. As he stood, he said, "Ladies and gentlemen, we are here today to eulogize a man who wielded his influence to lord it over our church and thought that his money excused his actions. And there is no greater proof of that than that earlier this week, his brother tried to bribe me to say only nice things about him here today." He took out the check and tore it up. "We don't need your money."

Jesus is concerned with authenticity. What does being authentic mean for your Christian love?

Keep in Mind

"For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified" ([Romans 2:13](#)).



Focal Verses

KJV

Romans 2:17 Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God,



18 And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law;

19 And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness,

20 An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.

21 Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?

22 Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?

23 Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?

24 For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written.

25 For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision.

26 Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision?

27 And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law?

28 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:

29 But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

NLT

Romans 2:17 You who call yourselves Jews are relying on God's law, and you boast about your special relationship with him.



18 You know what he wants; you know what is right because you have been taught his law.

19 You are convinced that you are a guide for the blind and a light for people who are lost in darkness.

20 You think you can instruct the ignorant and teach children the ways of God. For you are certain that God's law gives you complete knowledge and truth.

21 Well then, if you teach others, why don't you teach yourself? You tell others not to steal, but do you steal?

22 You say it is wrong to commit adultery, but do you commit adultery? You condemn idolatry, but do you use items stolen from pagan temples?

23 You are so proud of knowing the law, but you dishonor God by breaking it.

24 No wonder the Scriptures say, "The Gentiles blaspheme the name of God because of you."

25 The Jewish ceremony of circumcision has value only if you obey God's law. But if you don't obey God's law, you

are no better off than an uncircumcised Gentile.

26 And if the Gentiles obey God's law, won't God declare them to be his own people?

27 In fact, uncircumcised Gentiles who keep God's law will condemn you Jews who are circumcised and possess God's law but don't obey it.

28 For you are not a true Jew just because you were born of Jewish parents or because you have gone through the ceremony of circumcision.

29 No, a true Jew is one whose heart is right with God. And true circumcision is not merely obeying the letter of the law; rather, it is a change of heart produced by the Spirit. And a person with a changed heart seeks praise from God, not from people.

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The People, Places, and Times

Jews. This word originally referred specifically to a member of the tribe of Judah named for Jacob's fourth son. The word first occurs in [2 Kings 16:6](#), when the ten northern tribes called Israel joined with the king of Syria to fight against Judah. In the New Testament, the word "Jew" is used to describe members of the Jewish faith and their leaders. In modern times, the word is used to describe ethnic birth but not necessarily religion.



Gentiles. This was the term Jews used to describe those outside the people of Israel. The Jews believed that God was ruler of the whole world, including the Gentile nations. Gentiles were able to be saved by converting to the Jewish faith. At the same time, they were forbidden to mix with unconverted Gentiles. This meant that dining and intermarriage with Gentiles were forbidden. Ultimately the Jews regarded the Gentiles as impious, as most worshiped idols.

Background

Paul opposed the Jewish Christians who believed in the value of circumcision. Paul was not against the circumcision itself, if practiced as part of obeying God's whole Law, but the Jews wanted to impose circumcision on the Gentile Christians. Paul accuses them of being poor teachers: proud and doing whatever they want. If their hearts were changed at salvation, Paul argues, why do they need an outward show to validate this change?

At-A-Glance

1. Friend or Foe? ([Romans 2:17–24](#))
2. Real Circumcision (vv. 25–29)

In Depth

1. Friend or Foe? ([Romans 2:17–24](#))

God gave the Mosaic law to His people. He chose them to be an example to the nations that they might know who He really is. Instead of this resulting in humble gratitude and reverent service, it actually turned into boasting. They thought of themselves as better than the Gentiles. However, in verses 19–20, Paul says they are confident (assured, boastful) in being a guide of the blind and a light for those in darkness. Paul is almost quoting [Isaiah 42:6–7](#), where God calls Israel to be a “light of the Gentiles” and to “open the blind eyes.” Paul argues that even though the Jews possessed the Law and were God’s chosen people, they had no right to think of themselves as better than the Gentiles. They had committed the same sins, and Moses had given them the written law. The Gentiles only had general revelation, but the Jews had specific revelation of how to live before God. This would make them even more guilty before God.

Verse 24 speaks to the issue of ignoring God’s truth within you and mocking what you say you believe. This was the case with some of the Jews of Paul’s day.

2. Real Circumcision (vv. 25–29)

Paul argues that circumcision had no profit if unaccompanied by a righteous life. Circumcision doesn’t matter if one doesn’t keep the Law of God. In the same way we can say our church attendance or tithing means nothing if we are habitually committing sin. None of our religious rituals means anything if we do not live righteously and obey God’s commands. The real circumcision was the circumcision of the heart. Circumcision was a sign of the covenant the Jews had with God as His chosen people. Paul here says the heart must be changed to show true loyalty to God.

Paul goes on to explain who is a true Jew. Circumcision was considered the mark of a Jew; every Jewish male had to be circumcised. Here Paul says that circumciion does not make one a true Jew. A true Jew is one who follows the Law of God. One sign was external and could be praised by others; the other was inward and could only be seen by God.

Search the Scriptures

- 1 How does Paul define circumcision ([Romans 2:25–29](#))
2. What did Paul mean when he said, “But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly” (v. 29)?

Discuss the Meaning

Some find it easy to pray, fast, and read their Bibles religiously, but they do not always love people or choose to do the right thing. Christ looks for us to look like Him. He expects us to respond with our brothers and sisters, and looks for a heart that is right before Him. Are you allowing your heart to be broken by the truth of the Word of God? When you do not allow the truth of God's Word to penetrate your heart, what happens?

Lesson in Our Society

Corporate America makes demands of many workers. Companies sometimes uphold rules that encourage employees to neglect their Christian duties. However, at the end of the day, Christ will ask His believers, "Did you try to fit your Christian lifestyle onto your job, or did you let your Christianity lead you in work decisions?" Will the job run your life or will you allow Christ to lead you?

Make It Happen

The world encourages us to center our thoughts on anything but God's truth. From the media to our legal system, there are examples of God's truth being distorted and ignored as something repressive or primitive. This week, write down all the times that you notice the media upholding ideas opposite to God's truth.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do.

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned.

More Light on the Text

Romans 2:17–29

The reader should engage [Romans 2:17–29](#) understanding the wider context of the conversation that started at [Romans 1:18](#) and will continue until [Romans 3:20](#). At 1:18, Paul started a discourse to prove that both the Jews and the Gentiles have sinned before God, so both equally deserve to be punished. This argument reaches its climax at 3:23, where Paul concludes, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." To get there, Paul addresses the Gentiles outside Christ first ([Romans 1:18–32](#)). He dismisses the excuse that the Gentiles did not have the knowledge of God or His truth and therefore could not be judged. He says that the Gentiles did have the knowledge of the truth but chose to ignore it, and therefore deserve their punishment.

After that, in 2:1–16, Paul changes his rhetorical style and engages an interlocutor (person with whom he is speaking) whom he addresses only as "O man." Scholars are divided whether this person is a Gentile or a Jew. The dialogue with this person is focused on God's judgment being inescapable, righteous, and impartial—a conversation that could be more directed toward a Gentile, even though Paul possibly had a Jewish audience in mind. When we come to verse 17, Paul's attention shifts toward the Jews outside Christ. And here again, Paul engages an interlocutor who calls himself a Jew.

17 Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, 18 And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; 19 And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, 20 An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.

Here in verse 17, Paul begins his diatribe against the Jews who felt secure in their heritage by engaging an imagined

interlocutor: a confident Jew who takes pride in his “privileged position” with the Law and circumcision. This Jew calls himself a Jew, thus taking pride in his identity—and the monopoly on God that he thinks it gives him. Paul observes that this Jew relies on the Law. He boasts in God. He knows God’s will. He approves of what is superior. He is instructed in the Law. He is convinced that he is a guide for the blind and a light for those in the dark. He does all this because he has the “form” (Gk. *morphosis*, **MOR-fo-sees**), or embodiment, of knowledge and truth in the Law.

Several important points should be noted here. First, this Jew (whom Paul uses to address the wider attitudes of some of the Jews toward the law and the Gentiles) fancied himself to be a teacher of the Law both for those who are spiritually blind or in the dark, and those who are foolish or very young (Gk. *nepios*, **NAY-pee-ose**; infant, figuratively meaning those who are childish or immature). He may have been like Paul himself, a teacher to the God-fearers or Gentiles (v. 24). Of course, the Jews were supposed to be guides to the blind and light to those in darkness ([Isaiah 42:6–7](#), [49:6](#)). The Bible often uses blindness and darkness to portray ignorance of spiritual things, and the light of the Word of God dispels them both.

Paul is not saying that what the Jew does is wrong. If anything, only the first one may be problematic—he relies on the Law—and everything else he does is only skewed because of this. Relying on the Law to attain righteousness was the main problem of the non-Christian Jews. For many Jews, having the Law was a sign of favor. In their estimation, they were better taught than those without the Law. Many believed that simply the bestowal of the Law proved them to be favored by God above all others, so just having the Law, even without following it, was a ground of safety. Thus, the Jews boasted and bragged about their relationship with God, which is acceptable when done in the right spirit (see [Jeremiah 9:23–24](#)), and Paul does not condemn it here. It just shows the confidence that some of the Jews had in themselves. This particular Jew also approved of what is superior. This could mean simply discerning right from wrong, or more specifically discerning the essential superior elements of God’s will. Both the knowing of God’s will and the discerning of the essentials are possible because this Jew was instructed by the Law.

21 Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? 22 Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? 23 Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? 24 For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written.

Many translations introduce the previous four verses with an “if” in v. 17. The “then” in those translations finally comes up here in v. 21. In essence, Paul is saying, “If you bear the honorable name of a Jew, then why don’t you act as a real Jew should?” Paul is turning the tables on this Jew who does not live up to his knowledge or practice what he preaches.

Following this, Paul asks five rhetorical questions that testify to the Jew’s inconsistency: (1) you who teach, do you not teach yourself? (2) you who preach against stealing, do you steal? (3) you who say people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? (4) you who abhor idols, do you rob temples? and (5) you who boast in the Law, do you dishonor God by breaking the Law? These questions sound accusatory, but it would be wrong to assume that all Jews are guilty of these all the time. Paul is trying to get the Jews of the church in Rome to examine themselves. As his argument goes, these questions drive home the fact that every Jew has broken the Law at some point, so they also deserve punishment like the Gentiles.

Paul cites several of the Ten Commandments here (stealing, adultery and idolatry), which is both the beginning and the heart of the Mosaic Law. In essence, Paul is suggesting that any Jews who cannot even keep the Ten Commandments yet who also teach those commandments to others are in fact blaspheming God’s name (the second of the commandments after idolatry). In teaching the Law but not practicing it, these so-called teachers are in a far worse condition than those do not know the Law at all because they are blaspheming God’s very name by leading others astray through their actions as leaders..

The Jews boasted in the Law as much as they boasted in God ([Romans 2:17](#)). This too is not to be frowned upon, because the Jews were to honor the Law and take pride in it, rejoicing in its truth and guidance. Several Scriptures of the Old Testament, especially the Psalms, talk about rejoicing in the Law. For instance, [Psalm 119:97](#) testifies, “Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long” (NIV). Even though these Jews bragged in the Law, their transgression made their boasting of little consequence. Paul then implies that as a result of their transgressions, God’s name was blasphemed among the nations. The breaking of the Law did not only disgrace the Law but also the Lawgiver. Paul may have [Isaiah 52:5](#) and [Ezekiel 36:20–23](#) in mind here. In both texts, God’s name is mocked because His people had been defeated and enslaved. However, the defeat does not cause the blaspheming that Paul is talking about here, but their misconduct. The sins committed not only cause the sinner to offend God, but also cause others to blaspheme against Him. Even in our society today, the sins of the Christians bring dishonor to God’s name.

25 For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. 26 Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? 27 And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law?

In this group of verses, Paul focuses his argument toward what the Jews considered their last line of defense—the circumcision. In a nutshell, Paul says if possession (and knowledge) of the Law could not exempt the Jews from the judgment, neither could circumcision. It was not a surefire insurance against the wrath of God, which many of the people of the time believed. Several Rabbinic epigrams expressed that common belief: “Circumcised men do not descend into Gehenna [i.e., hell],” and “Circumcision will deliver Israel from Gehenna.”

To prove his point about circumcision, Paul does the same thing he has done with the Law in the preceding verses. He demolishes any confidence in circumcision to show that it has no basis for the salvation of the Jews from judgment, just like adherence to the Law. The very first statement in this section throws down the gauntlet: circumcision has value—if they observe the Law. Thus, Paul does not deny the significance of circumcision, only shifts the emphasis to where it should be—obedience. Circumcision does not replace the need for observing the whole Law. In fact, for circumcision to be effective, it requires obedience to the entire Law. Consequently, the Law and circumcision work together, and one without the other is useless for salvation. The primary requirement for the covenant is neither the possession of the Law nor circumcision; it is obedience which both the Law and circumcision require. Thus, Paul can conclude that breaking the Law even once negates the circumcision. He says circumcision without obedience is the same as no circumcision at all. On the other hand, uncircumcision with obedience is just as good as circumcision.

28 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: 29 But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

Paul goes a step further to redefine what it means to be a true Jew in contrast to the self-righteous Jew of vv. 17–21. At first, he states what a true Jew is not—one who is only outwardly Jewish. True Jewishness is not based on external circumstances, like circumcision of the flesh. In fact, circumcision is not merely outward and physical. Thus, true Jewishness depends on things of the inside where only God can see. The real circumcision that matters is that of the heart. Paul says a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly (Gk. *en to krypto*, **en toe kroop-TOE**, in secret), and true circumcision is of the heart by the Spirit, not of the Law. Paul is adopting a concept of the Old Testament. Several times, God talks about uncircumcised hearts, pleads with His people to circumcise their hearts, and then says that He will circumcise them ([Leviticus 26:41](#); [Deuteronomy 10:16](#), [30:6](#)). Paul sums this concept well when he says, “For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. Though I might also have confidence in the flesh” (from [Philippians 3:3–4](#)). In the context of [Romans 2](#), Paul is saying that not all Jews are real Jews, because the real Jews are those who are circumcised in the heart by the Spirit (Gk. *pneuma*, **puh-NEW-ma**, either a person’s spirit or the Holy Spirit) and not in the “letter” (Gk. *gramma*, **GRAH-mah**, writing; here, particularly sacred writing). With this idea, Paul begins to

establish the difference between the old covenant (of the external Law) and the new covenant (the gift of the Spirit).



A true Jew's praise is not from other people but from God, because only He sees the heart, where the real circumcision is evident. People only see the outside and thus cannot praise with truth, sometimes praising those who do not deserve praise and other times withholding praise where it is due. Thus Paul again asserts true Jews are those who are God's children by the Spirit and not those who boast to be Israel's descendants by the flesh.



Say It Correctly

Blasphemy. **BLAS**-fuh-mee.

Gentiles. **JIN**-tiles.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Dark vs. Light

[John 1:1–9](#)



TUESDAY

Hate vs. Love

[John 15:18–27](#)



WEDNESDAY

Doubt vs. Faith

[2 Corinthians 4:1–6](#)



THURSDAY

Grace vs. Law

[Galatians 2:11–21](#)



FRIDAY

Lies vs. Truth

[Ephesians 4:25–32](#)



SATURDAY

Wicked vs. Righteous

[Isaiah 26:1–12](#)



SUNDAY

Ignoring God's Truth Within Us

[Romans 2:17–29](#)

