



# Finer Grounds Bible Study

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## Romans

### Lesson 4: Romans 2:12-29

Who do you love? For most of us the list is long: our spouse, our children, our parents, our siblings, our friends, our brethren... Just as importantly, how do these people know that we love them? No doubt we tell them. I will never forget the time about seven years ago when I had been on the phone with a sister in Christ, and as we hung up I said, "bye, I love you!" At first, I was completely humiliated! That was how I ended calls with my family! But as I thought about it I realized it wasn't just a habitual response, it came to mind because I truly did love this sister, and that is certainly nothing to be humiliated about.

However, for a relationship to flourish, words are simply not enough. If I tell my husband that I love him but then act bitter and resentful when he needs my help, what message am I sending him? If I claim to love my children but ignore them when they ask me to do things for them, what message am I sending them? If I claim to love my brethren but don't spend any time with them, what message am I sending? In typical Paul fashion today's section of Scripture is very wordy, but it all boils down to this: we cannot claim to love God and live in rebellion to his laws. We cannot claim to be Christians if we are not living in obedience from our hearts.

#### Read Romans 2:12-13

In chapter one Paul emphasized the horrible consequences awaiting the unrighteousness. Now in verses 12-13 he tells us how to ensure that we are counted among the righteous. Paul is basically saying that whether you are a Gentile without the law of Moses or a Jew with the law of Moses, sin is sin and will condemn you just the same. However, we if are a "doer" of the law we will be found righteous.

God has never merely wanted mental assent from his people. Hosea 6:6 tells us that God desires steadfast love and not sacrifice. Matthew 9:13 tells us that God desires mercy and not sacrifice. He has never wanted followers who simply sit in a pew on Sunday mornings and can quote Scripture. If you'll remember from Luke chapter four even Satan himself has head knowledge of Scripture. What God desires is for us to take His laws and implant them in our hearts to the extent that, just as those in Acts 2:37, we are cut to the heart when we do not live according to those laws. Sisters, we must be doers of the word.

One more point of interest in this text is that in verse 13 there is no definite article in the Greek language (Dan Owens). This means that rather than referring to "the" law, as in



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the law of Moses, Paul is referring to law in general, or God's overall expectations of us as humans. Basically, whether we are a Jew or a Gentile, regardless of what we hear or say if we reject God's commands we are lost, and if we obey them we will be justified.

**While we may not be as blatant in our sin as the Jews, are we truly doers of the word?**

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**Being a doer of the word means doing our best to fulfill God's requirements of us. Are we guilty of responding to certain commands with, "That's not my talent," or "I'm not comfortable with that"? From Paul's description of the Jews so far, do you believe God will accept these reasons for us not doing all He has commanded?**

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**Is there a specific way you struggle to be a doer of the law? Perhaps when it comes to sharing the Gospel with the lost? Maybe the idea of teaching a Bible class terrifies you. What about leading a prayer or a song in ladies' Bible study?**

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Pray for courage and steadfastness, and take action this week to truly become a doer of the law. Remember, God never demanded that we all be amazing at everything, He simply asks that we do our best from the heart. If our heart is right before God, we cannot fail.

### **Read Romans 2:14-16**

This is an interesting section that I believe goes back to 1:20 where Paul described how even those who are in the world are without excuse because God has made Himself known. This passage is tied very closely to the moral argument for the existence of God, which basically states: because morality exists, God exists. Every nation known to mankind has some system of law and morality, and for the most part these systems have a similar foundation. For instance, the majority of mankind would agree that it is wrong to murder, steal, or damage property, and that it is the duty of man to be kind and helpful. Paul's argument here is that this basic moral code, what he refers to as the law of conscience, is given to us by God to help direct us. He is saying that someone who only knows the law of conscience but strives to live by it in order to please God, will be better off on the day of judgment than a Jew who knows the law of Moses yet does not live by it.

In verse 15 the phrase, "work of the law" is also interesting. This is different from "works of the law," which is always negative (Truth for Today). "Works of the law" refers



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to trying to earn our salvation by works of merit, however in this context “work of the law” refers to allowing God’s will to work on our hearts. This is the primary difference Paul is making between the Jews and the Gentiles, the Gentiles were striving to have pure hearts while the Jews were not.

A word of caution when it comes to new Christians and obedience from the heart: we must remember to meet them where they are at and give them room to grow. Sometimes I believe we are guilty of stifling the hearts of new Christians because we are either 1. Hyper critical as the Jews were or 2. So steeped in the way things have “always been done” that we inadvertently stifle their growth. Things such as language and modest dress can be very difficult for individuals from the world to change. We need to make sure to approach these issues with love, grace and compassion with our new sisters. In addition, if a new sister prepares communion and lines the trays up differently than usual or asks to help with a ministry that sister Sue has been in charge of for 20 years, please give her the opportunity to learn and grow. Nourish the soil of her heart with love, guidance and encouragement.

### Read Romans 2:17-24

In his Workshop in the Word notes, Denny Petrillo points out that this section contains five advantages that the Jews had that correlate with Christianity, followed by four responsibilities.

### 5 Advantages:

- The name “Jew” identified them as God’s chosen people, just as the name “Christian” identifies us as followers of Christ.
- The Jews had the law of Moses, and as Christians we have the law of Christ to help us discern God’s will.
- The Jews could boast in having a special relationship with God, and now all Christians can boast in having a special relationship with God.
- Jews knew God’s will and were in a covenant relationship with Him, as Christians we also know God’s will and enter a covenant relationship with Him.
- Both the law of Moses and the law of Christ teach us what is important to God and how to be obedient to it.

### 4 Responsibilities:

- Guide to the blind
- A light to those in darkness
- A corrector of the foolish
- A teacher of the immature

Even those of us who are not superhero fans are probably familiar with the quote from Spiderman’s Uncle Ben, “With great power comes great responsibility.” As God’s chosen people the Jews were given tremendous advantages. These advantages protected them through many battles as we see throughout the Old Testament, but these advantages even protected them from things such as the Black Death. History tells us that



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when the Black Death swept through Europe in the 14th Century, most blamed the Jews. Their primary evidence? The fact that the Jewish population, thanks to the sanitation practices handed down in the Law of Moses, did not suffer from the plague as others did.

Yet with these tremendous advantages came pivotal expectations, for us as well as the Jews. As Christians we have experienced grace, love, forgiveness and peace in a way that the world simply cannot understand. We have unlimited access to God the Father through prayer, forgiveness of our sins through the blood of Christ, and the Holy Spirit to help convict and guide us. The question then becomes; what are we doing with these advantages? Are we, like the Jews, choosing to sit in judgment of the world while refusing to acknowledge our own shortcomings? Or are we instead choosing to reach out to the world and say, "I know where you are, I've been there. Let me show you a better road that we can walk together."

Verse 22 contains a particularly harsh accusation. According to the Truth for Today Commentary, when Paul accuses the Jews of robbing the temples this was one of the most heinous crimes in the ancient world. Individuals caught stealing from the temples were convicted of treason and were not allowed to be buried in consecrated ground. While the Jews understood that these temples were to false gods, to the Gentiles they were holy, and desecrating them was an insult to the Roman society.

It certainly appears that the Jews had never heard the phrase, "practice what you preach." They had no problem correcting those sinful Gentiles while their own hearts and lives were far from godly. The worst part of their hypocrisy is found in verse 24, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you." The same is true for us today. If we wear the name of Christ and identify ourselves as His people, and then do not live in obedience to His law, we are blaspheming the name of God to the world.

**How do we view the "laws" of the Christian faith? Do we "have" to go to worship, or do we "get" to go to worship? Are we like Jeremiah where the amazing things God has done for us are like fire in our bones so that we cannot help but share it with others? Do we feel deprived or resentful when we can't dress, speak or have fun like the world? The answers to these questions will provide insight to our hearts before the Lord. What are we showing the world about our Savior?**

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Sometimes I think we get so caught up in our worldview that we fail to stop and think how the world views us. It breaks my heart at times to enter the world of social media, because I see my brethren belittling and making hateful jokes, ironically, in response to the hatefulness of the world. But what does this show the world about the heart of believers? I have actually had a non-Christian



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say to me, "How can a Christian talk to me about obedience, I have seen how they speed and violate laws they deem unimportant."

**Based on your consistency in obeying the laws of the land and your treatment of those in the world, perhaps even those who are hateful and ugly to believers, how will the world view the heart of the Christian?**

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## Read Romans 2:25-29

We find the word "circumcision" 10 times in these five verses. In the mind of the Jews the act of circumcision was what truly set them apart and marked them as different. Much as in the act of baptism the Christian is washed of their sins and marked as different by the Holy Spirit. What the Jews failed to understand was that circumcision was never about the physical act, it was about obedience from the heart (Deut. 10:16, 30:6). Just as according to 1 Peter 3:21 baptism is not about the act of getting wet, but rather an appeal to God for a clean conscience through the resurrection of Christ.

As 21st Century Christians what we oftentimes miss is that God is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). Yes, under the Law of Moses there were physical commands that the Jews were expected to obey. Yes, as Christians there are physical commands we are to obey: baptism, attending worship, giving, singing, praying,

etc. Even so, it has never been about the physical acts, but the heart that is guiding the acts.

My husband and I have four children, and in our home we expect and demand humble obedience from our children. If we ask a child to unload the dishwasher, and they roll their eyes and stomp away to go unload the dishwasher, they are disciplined. Some might say, "Why?! They are doing what they were told to do!" My response is yes, and no. Sure they might be completing a task that they were told to do, but in that moment, they do not have a submissive and obedient heart. Our goal is for our children to grow into adults who love and respect us and will then channel the love and respect they have for us into a love and respect for their Creator. If my children grow up and claim to be Christians, yet do not lovingly submit to God's laws from the heart, then they will grow up to blaspheme the name of God. It's hard for me to even type those words because it terrifies me. Why then would my standards for my children be different than God's standards? He demands obedience from the heart; therefore, we demand obedience from the heart.

**Have you truly been obedient to God from the heart, or has Christianity merely become a checklist or something you do on Sunday mornings?**

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**How can the church as a whole do a better job of showing the heart of Christ to the world around us?**

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Think of one area in your life where your heart is not as obedient as it should be. Take action this week to soften your heart before God Almighty and ask a trusted sister to help hold you accountable.

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Dan Owen's class on Greek, Bear Valley Bible Institute.

Truth for Today Commentary on Romans by Paul Pollard, PhD.

Workshop in the Word, Denny Petrillo