

## Devotional Questions – Romans 2:17-29

1. *What were the Jews resting in (Romans 2:17-18)?*
2. *What were they confident in - why (Romans 2:19)?*
3. *What did they think they were (Romans 2:19-20)?*
4. *If sin dishonours God what should our attitude be (Romans 2:23)?*
5. *What does ‘the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of\* you’ mean (Romans 2:24)?* \*The correct expression is **“the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you.”** **“Through”** indicates Jews’ wrong-doing by **“spirit and soul and body”** 1 Thesalonians 5:23 i.e. it was total. **“Because of”** does not have that full sense.

*Can this be true of a Christian – if so in what way?*

6. *What value does outward religious rites (i.e. circumcision or baptism\*) have (Romans 2:25-27)?* \*Baptism should not be understood as a religious rite but as **“the like figure”** of salvation **“by the resurrection of Jesus Christ”** 1 Peter 3:21.

7. *What makes the rites acceptable to God (Romans 2:28-29)?*

*What does it mean to have a ‘Spirit-circumcised’\* heart?* \*The correct expression is **“circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter”** because it is God via **“the word of God”** Who carries out this circumcision **“piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow”** Hebrews 4:12 and **“God is a Spirit”** John 4:24. This circumcision is therefore **“in the spirit”** because it is a *literal* but *spiritual* severing of spirit from flesh. See remarks on Colossians 2:10-12 for further detail.

8. *What is the point of contrasting the praise of men with the praise of God (Romans 2:29)?*

*How does this apply to Christians today?*

9. *What other lessons should Christians take to heart today?*

## Devotional Questions – Romans 2:17-29, Answers to Questions

See Dr Ruckman's commentary *The Book of Romans* pp 90-99 and the *Ruckman Reference Bible* pp 1389, 1488, 1492, 1494, 1568 for detailed comment.

### 1. *What were the Jews resting in (Romans 2:17-18)?*

They rested in ***“the law of God”*** Romans 7:22, 25, 8:7 in which they boasted, by which they were enlightened and of which ***“the things that are more excellent”*** they approved ***“being instructed out of the law”*** Romans 2:18 but which law was not obeyed ***“with all thine heart, and with all thy soul”*** Deuteronomy 30:10.

As Stephen summarised, that un-kept law effectively became a bed of nails for the Lord Jesus Christ in that via ***“in his hands the print of the nails”*** John 20:25 ***“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree”*** Galatians 3:13:

***“Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it”*** Acts 7:52-53.

Today's believer should therefore rest upon the promise that ***“But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ”*** Ephesians 2:13.

### 2. *What were they confident in - why (Romans 2:19)?*

They were confident in themselves to instruct others in doing right ***“being instructed out of the law”*** themselves Romans 2:18 but like today's believer should have been instructed by the publican not the Pharisee.

***“And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted”*** Luke 18:9-14.

### 3. *What did they think they were (Romans 2:19-20)?*

They thought that they were ***“a light that shineth in a dark place”*** 2 Peter 1:19 and each of them ***“the messenger of the LORD of hosts”*** Malachi 2:7 to ***“turn many away from iniquity”*** because ***“The law of truth was in his mouth”*** Malachi 2:6.

***“The law of truth”*** did not proceed any further with them though because Deuteronomy 6:6 ***“And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart”*** was not obeyed ***“in sincerity and in truth”*** Joshua 24:14 ***“but feignedly”*** Jeremiah 3:10 or at best only by rote.

The result was ***“the contempt of families”*** Job 31:34 i.e. ordinary folk that in turn elicited the warning from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

***“Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not”*** Matthew 23:1-3.

The words of the well-known Scottish poet Robert Burns, 1759-1796, come to mind.

See [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert\\_Burns](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Burns), [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/To\\_a\\_Louse](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/To_a_Louse).

Burns original

*O wad some Pow' r the giftie gie us  
To see oursels as ithers see us!  
It wad frae mony a blunder free us,  
An' foolish notion:  
What airs in dress an' gait wad lea' e us,  
An' ev' n devotion!*

Standard English translation

*And would some Power the small gift give us  
To see ourselves as others see us!  
It would from many a blunder free us,  
And foolish notion:  
What airs in dress and gait would leave us,  
And even devotion!*

Today's believer should follow Peter's exhortation though it prove to be difficult for now.

**“Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation”** 1 Peter 2:12.

4. *If sin dishonours God what should our attitude be (Romans 2:23)?*

The attitude of today's believer should be as Paul exhorts for believers of all times and places.

**“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God”** 1 Corinthians 10:31.

5. *What does ‘the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of\* you’ mean (Romans 2:24)?* \*The correct expression is **“the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you.”** “Through” indicates Jews’ wrong-doing by **“spirit and soul and body”** 1 Thesalonians 5:23 i.e. it was total. “Because of” does not have that full sense.

It means in effect to suffer and be reviled for the right reasons, not the wrong reasons.

Bring not shame to the name but instead praise to the same.

**“If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf”** 1 Peter 4:12-14.

Can this be true of a Christian – if so in what way?

- *Malice and dishonesty of any kind*

**“Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men”** Romans 12:17. See *Question 3* and 1 Peter 2:12. This principle applies particularly with respect to money and prompt payment of debt in both the ministry and secular contexts. **“Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it”** Proverbs 3:27.

- *Open acceptance of evil*

**“It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father’s wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you”** 1 Corinthians 5:1-2. 1 Corinthians 5:1-2 raises the spectre of churches tolerating or even advocating unnatural liaisons.

See [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ordination\\_of\\_LGBT\\_Christian\\_clergy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ordination_of_LGBT_Christian_clergy) which states in part While the majority of churches are opposed to it because they view [homosexuality](#) and [transgenderism](#) as incompatible with Biblical teaching and traditional Christian practice...there are an increasing number of Christian churches and communities that are open to the ordination of people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgender. It would appear from this site that even amongst Conservative Protestants and Evangelical opposition to ordination of sodomite clergy is 2/3 to 80% i.e. appreciably less than 100%. What must the mass of unsaved individuals outside the church think?

- *Dissension between believers before unbelievers*

**“I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers”** 1 Corinthians 6:5-6. Though not in the legal context, this writer listened to an account many years ago of an argument between two Christians before unbelievers of which was more important, the word or prayer. The account was given by one of the Christians. In the end, he said, he and the other believer later decided that both the word and prayer were important. He admitted, however, that the unbelievers listening to the pair must have been perplexed, which would not be a good outcome.

- *Indiscreet wives*

**“But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine: That...The aged women...may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed”** Titus 2:1, 2-5. This exhortation can apply especially for a saved young woman, either married or single i.e. aspiring to marriage in matters of dress i.e. achieving elegance and avoiding ostentation such that it may be said of her as for Ruth **“for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman”** Ruth 3:11.

Paul therefore has a challenging exhortation in principle that today’s believer should aspire to concerning such matters as the above.

**“According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death”** Philippians 1:20.

6. What value does outward religious rites (i.e. circumcision or baptism\*) have (Romans 2:25-27)? \*Baptism should not be understood as a religious rite but as ***“the like figure”*** of salvation ***“by the resurrection of Jesus Christ”*** 1 Peter 3:21.

The practice of circumcision was valuable to Timothy as a testimony. ***“Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek”*** Acts 16:3.

Any outward religious observance e.g. regularly going off to church on a Sunday a.m. while neighbours are cutting the lawn, washing the car, getting ready to go play golf, may therefore be valuable to enhance testimony, particularly if the church-going includes the whole family.

***“For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed”*** Romans 10:11.

7. What makes the rites acceptable to God (Romans 2:28-29)?

See *Question 6* and remarks. Note the Old Testament admonition that applies to today’s believer in principle as Paul exhorts.

***“Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked”*** Deuteronomy 10:16.

***“Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart”*** 2 Timothy 2:22.

What does it mean to have a ‘Spirit-circumcised’\* heart? \*The correct expression is ***“circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter”*** because it is God via ***“the word of God”*** Who carries out this circumcision ***“piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow”*** Hebrews 4:12 and ***“God is a Spirit”*** John 4:24. This circumcision is therefore ***“in the spirit”*** because it is a *literal* but *spiritual* severing of spirit from flesh. See remarks on Colossians 2:10-12 for further detail.

***“Circumcision...in the spirit”*** Romans 2:29 is as Paul states for the believer with respect to a spiritual operation ***“And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead”*** Colossians 2:10-12.

***“Soul and spirit”*** are cut loose from the flesh by ***“the circumcision of Christ...the operation of God”*** so that as Paul exhorts ***“This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh”*** Galatians 5:16 but instead bring forth ***“the fruit of the Spirit”*** Galatians 5:22 because as evidence of this fruit ***“If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another”*** Galatians 5:25-26.

Rather, as Paul also exhorts for the spiritually circumcised individual ***“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others...For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure”*** Philippians 2:3-4, 13.

8. What is the point of contrasting the praise of men with the praise of God (Romans 2:29)?

It is essential to know the difference and to understand what meets God's approval, if not man's.

**"And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God"**

Luke 16:15.

**"But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart"** 1 Samuel 16:7.

**"Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God"** 1 Corinthians 4:5.

How does this apply to Christians today?

See 1 Corinthians 4:5 and note James' admonition.

**"Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded"** James 4:8.

Heart purification requires word application, as much for today's believer as when first written.

**"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee"** Psalm 119:9-11.

9. What other lessons should Christians take to heart today?

King Solomon in the Book of Proverbs gives many good exhortations for the heart, which in the Old Testament context match the information given in answer to Questions 7, 8 with respect to **"circumcision...of the heart, in the spirit"** Romans 2:29.

The following has stuck with this writer over many years.

In principle this exhortation is very practical. See remarks in Question 5.

**"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths"** Proverbs 3:5-6.