

Romans: The Religious One

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[0 : 00] Okay, well we are talking about the book of Romans. We were reminded last week that Paul is taking us into this deep, dark place, this pit, where every one of us should be going, oh my gosh, I don't know if I can handle that.

And that is his intent, to show us that we can't handle it. That it's impossible. Hopefully you picked up this book of Romans. We made them for everybody so that you could take them and read them. I've been reading mine throughout the week and trying to catch up with things. You know that no one emailed or text messaged a question on Romans this week.

I mean there was one. It was, how come you always wear a blue shirt and khaki pants? But that wasn't really covered in Romans 1 or 2. That's like Romans 5. So I purposely didn't wear a blue shirt today.

I was white with that. But besides that, no one emailed me any questions. So I just figured, wow, we must be doing really good. Everybody doesn't have any questions on the book of Romans and we're doing really good. But I did get something emailed.

[1 : 09] My wife emailed me an article from Forbes. And so I thought I would just share that, which I thought was kind of interesting. So I got it. It's in this week.

It's Forbes ranking the nine toughest leadership roles. Number one, or number nine, corporate CEO. And after each one of these things, they gave pros and cons, pros and cons of each one of them.

Number eight, United States congressperson. Number seven, editor for a daily newspaper. These are the toughest leadership roles.

Number six, a mayor. Number five, pastor. I thought this was very interesting because each one of them, they gave a pros and cons.

And so let me read to you what the pros of being a pastor are. You're seen as a man of God. I don't know if we have the pro up there, do we? Yeah. You're seen as a man of God and what you say is taken seriously, at least for a moment.

[2 : 12] I was like, whoa, okay, yeah. They're going to have people lining up for that job, right? So the cons. Being a pastor is like death by a thousand paper cuts, says Reverend Dr. Ken Fung, senior pastor at Baptist, Rosemead, California, and program director at Fuller.

You're scrutinized and criticized from the top to the bottom, stem and stern. You work for an invisible perfect boss. And you're supposed to lead a ragtag gaggle of volunteers towards God's coming future.

It's like herding cats, but it's harder. So I'm not going to make any comments on that whatsoever. But I felt like, wow, that's very interesting how people feel some of that pain.

Remember, we're going through Romans. Romans, if you're here for the first time and you're hearing this, you're like, oh, we're building a foundation. And Paul is building a foundation. Paul was probably the most brilliant mind in the New Testament time.

He studied under the greatest leaders. He was a rabbi. He was a scribe. He was a Pharisee. And so far in chapters one and two, these are the things that we've learned as part of this foundation.

[3 : 27] We've learned about Paul. His name was Saul, and he met Christ as he was persecuting the church, and he had a conversion experience. We talked about the gospel. The gospel says it is the good news.

It's God saves dead people. Not God saves 51% good people. God saves dead people. We've talked about righteousness. Righteousness means to be put in right standing.

It's both a legal and a relational term. And the focus in Romans is to be put in right standing with God. God saves us. God saves us. We've learned in Scripture, and again, this is what we've been

learning. This is what Scripture says.

Whether we believe it or not or whether we live like it or not, that's another question. But this is what God's Word says. That God created us, number one, to serve and worship Him. God created us, two, to live unselfish lives.

And God created us, three, to live an amazing life with Him. We also learned that sin entered into His creation and into us. We saw in chapter 1, verse 22 and 23, that sin disorders our worship.

[4 : 29] We went from worshiping the God who is the creator to worshiping created things. We saw that in chapter 121, that sin disorders our beliefs and our thinking. That we knew God, but we refused to worship Him as God.

We refused to worship Him as God. We worshiped other things. We didn't give Him thanks. We saw that sin disorders our desires and our actions, chapter 124. We treat people poorly because sin has come into our life.

We also saw that because of this disorder, God is angry. We use the word wrath. But God hates things that hurt us. Do you know that?

God hates things that hurt you? God hates things that hurt His creation? And the scripture says that that's going to be played out in wrath, His anger, one day.

We learn in chapter 2 that there are these moral people. And as they hear the gospel, they don't relate to what Paul is saying at all. The moral person is quick to find failure and brokenness in others, but not necessarily themselves.

[5 : 34] We saw that the longer they, us, deny our problems because of our stubbornness and our unrepentant hearts. Remember, those are words for idols and idolatry, that we worship things in our lives and we don't want to confess.

And so the longer we not confess that more judgment is stored up for us before the Lord. We saw that one day we all will stand before God to be judged.

That's what scripture says. Judgment will be sure. It's on a specific day. It's going to be according to the truth. You're not going to be able to say, well, I didn't mean that.

You know, I have a kid who always says, well, that wasn't my fault. It happened here. That is not going to be that. It's going to be impartial. The word there is God doesn't give face to anybody. He looks at us just as we are.

He doesn't see rich people or poor people or Americans or Australians and treat Americans better. But He just sees everybody. You know where that's going.

[6 : 32] We saw that His judgment is objective and we saw that it's based on our works.

Remember we talked about that. That God in the end time will come and He's going to look at the works that we've done for Him.

The works don't bring us to God, but the works are a result of coming to God. Right? So we're not saying I'm working really hard to be a better person so God would like me. But we're saying God came into my life.

He changed me. He opened my eyes. He redeemed and renewed my heart. And because of that, I'm changed and I live out my life differently. We gave the illustration of God as a venture capitalist. Remember that? We said God's this venture capitalist. He's given you a ton of money to do things. He's given you talents and gifting and where you were born and your house and your education. And all these things God has given you and in the end day, He's going to come and He's going to see what kind of investment you gave Him.

Was He stupid for investing in us? He's going to see how did we do with that. And in verse 4, which I felt like was one of the verses that I kept coming back to over and over and over again, we saw that God is patient.

[7 : 37] But God's kind. But God doesn't want to pour His wrath out on us. In fact, the Old Testament says His wrath is His unusual work. He doesn't want to do that. He wants us to repent and to come to Him and to love Him.

And then it's almost as if Paul is looking out his window and he's writing the gospel and he's thinking of people who've walked by his room. And he's saying, well, how are they going to respond to the gospel?

And then he sees this moralist. How are they going to respond to it? What are they going to say? What are their excuses going to be? And he finally gets to this group of people who are the leading people in his society, the religious people.

The Jew, the leaders, they're the top of the pyramid. And Paul is going to write to them this letter in chapter 2, verses 17 to 29. And he wants to look at their hearts.

He wants to look at our hearts. And he wants to show us what's going to happen to us. How do we respond to the gospel as a religious person? What are the things? And as a religious person, do we understand that we have this massive, massive need?

[8 : 42] Do we understand that we have this massive, massive problem? Or do we think we're just okay and everything is good? He's writing to the religious people.

They're the people who followed traditions and rituals. I mean, they're the people who think they're okay because they're doing all the right things. They're doing all the religious things. They're going to church. They're in a group. They're reading their Bible.

He's talking to people who perform well on the outside or pretty good or at least better than the people beside them. He's talking to us who perform. And as we perform, we believe that, you know, I'm doing pretty good.

And so God must be happy with me. And things must be pretty good between myself and God. He's talking to people who tend to think outwardly instead of inwardly. He's talking to people who deal with the outward instead of the inward reality.

I mean, wicked people, evil people, people in chapter 1 and 2, tax collectors, lawyers, prostitutes, Democrats, members of the NRA, Australians, South Africans. They all know they're sinful.

[9 : 40] They all know that they have this big problem. They all know that they're in bondage, that they're out of control. They wonder if God could ever forgive them. But the religious person, they don't think those things.

The religious person doesn't think they need forgiveness because they're not really that bad.

Religious people, maybe at one time in their life, they ask for forgiveness of sin, but they don't do it anymore. They don't want to talk about sin. Sin's a bad thing.

Let's not talk about that. I've been forgiven. Let's just look outwardly. Let's not look inwardly. The religious people, they grow up. They grow up in Catholic homes. They grow up in Baptist homes. They grow up in Methodist homes.

They grow up in Christian homes. They grow up in every type of home. He's talking to people who get baptized as a baby or as an adult, who've been dedicated, who've been confirmed, who've been bar mitzvahed, who've walked down the aisle one time or another.

He's talking to people who go to the right church, who study the Bible, who memorize scripture, who pray when they have a need or at least when they think they have a need, who people who serve in the choir, people who count the offering, people who know the books of the Bible.

[10 : 50] He's talking to the people who even know how to share about religion, to people who are lost. Remember, the religious people, they felt like everything they do outwardly is perfect or almost perfect.

And so when they hear Paul talk about the lostness in the gospel, they don't need that type of savior because they're not that lost or not that broken. They're actually pretty good.

They're okay. Remember, Paul, in these 10 or so verses, he's talking to people in his day and at watermark.

People who take God's word very, very seriously. And people who are doing the best to be religious outwardly. They're going to do all the right things. It's almost as if you can divide the section in two parts.

The first part is 17 to 24. 17 to 24 is inwardly and 24 to 29 is outwardly. And he's talking to us who do all the things right inwardly and we try to do all the things right outwardly. And we're hoping that if we do all these things that God's going to look at us and we're going to be okay.

[11 : 57] He's talking to Tobin. And Paul is going to, in his passage, he's going to take this baseball bat and he's basically going to beat Tobin over the head.

And maybe some of us over the head. And he's going to show us that our religion doesn't save us. And that no matter how religious we are, we're in trouble. No matter how religious we are, we're going to fail.

The first thing the passage says, if you look at it in verses 17 through 20, Paul gives these ideas of what it means to be religious. He gives these incredible things. He says they're a Jew.

The word is from Judah. It means to praise God. It's an amazing name. People were really proud of it. They would say, like, I'm Tobin Miller Jew. Because it was such an important and great honor.

I mean, they had God's law and God had given it to Moses and they came down to Mount Sinai. I mean, they had a relationship with God. In verse 17, they knew God's will. They knew what was right and wrong.

[12:57] I mean, all the other people walking around them, they don't have God's word. So they don't know what is right and wrong. But the religious person, they know what's right and what's wrong. And they can look at it.

They've been taught by God's word. And they had this huge badge on them, like Sunday school, like 20 gold stars. Because God has been teaching them over and over and over. In fact, they've been instructed so well that they can even instruct foolish people and blind people and infants and Texans.

They can teach them all the gospel. Maybe a modern day version of this would be something like this. You, you watermarker. You say you're a Christian and you have no doubt that you've experienced with God.

You prayed that prayer on the bulletin several times that day. And you remember the relief and the emotion that you felt that Sunday or at the community group. Now you take communion with confidence and no worry like you had before.

God is awesome. You went to the membership class. You signed the document. You met with the elders. You died right into community group and men's group and women's group and accountability group. You started Porterbrook studies. BSF studies.

[13:59] You started serving. You know your Bible. You read it every day. You have this really cool app on your phone and you can read it from your phone. You know how to act and not act in church. You know what to say and what not to say. How to look and what not to look.

You're pretty confident, even, that you can save lost people. And make them religious like you. All these things are really, really good.

But what Paul warns us is these things is if we just cling to these things, if we just think of them inwardly, we're lost. I mean, religion can show you the law and it can show you things outwardly. But it can't bring it into your heart. It can't show you what's going on in your heart at the heart level. In fact, the passage says instead in verse 17 that what it does is religion, it feeds your pride. It doesn't humble you. 17, but if you bear the name Jew, so praise the Lord. It says you rely on the law. It doesn't say you obey the law. It says you use the law. It's a tool.

[15:02] It's something that you use to make yourself feel good. And you boast in God. It's not like you boast that God is great. You boast that you're a Christian. That you're doing so much better than other people.

There's this really interesting passage that Jesus taught about. And we talked about it maybe a year ago in Luke. Because we've been going through Luke for so long. Luke 18, verses 10 to like 11.

Jesus is telling this story. And he says two men went up into the temple to pray. One a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and he was praying thus to himself. God, I thank you that I'm not like other people.

Swindlers, unjust, adulterers, and even this tax collector. I mean, I fast twice a week. I tithe out of all that you give me.

Paul's talking to people like that who rely on God's law to make themselves look big and important.

[16:05] They use God's law as a tool. The word boast there is really specific. It's not saying you're giving glory to God. It means you're honoring yourself.

Every morning the rabbis would get up and they would pray. And they say, oh God, thank you that I'm not a dog. Thank you that I'm not a woman. Thank you that I'm not a tax collector or a Gentile. There wasn't a praise to how great and amazing God is. But there was a praise and a greatness to how amazing they are. Paul says that if we're religious, if we struggle with these things, we're going to boast and we're going to rely on things besides God.

So the question here is this. What do you rely on? What is it in your life that you boast in?

What is it you say, this is what I am and this is who I am and this is what makes me important? In my life, I feel like I've boasted and relied on things like being disciplined.

[17:16] And waking up early and knowing God's word and having quiet times and being orthodox. In my name, in integrity. And being baptized. And being a member of a church.

But Paul says if we rely on those things and those things by themselves, we'll fail. We're lost.

What is it that you boast in? Verse 17 through 24, Paul says the problem is, is that not that we're doing it, the problem is that we're not practicing what we're preaching.

I mean, Paul knows that religious people, the most important thing is their appearance. Not inwardly. So religious people like me and like you, we can talk a good game.

We can put up a good front. But Paul says be careful. Because inside you might be hollow. Or you might be plastic.

[18:19] Maybe a question we should ask ourselves is, do we practice what we preach? I mean, as a parent, how many times has your kiddos caught you being a hypocrite?

How many times have they taught you doing things that you told them not to do? Paul says be careful because if you're religious, it's going to prevent you from examining your heart.

And you're never going to teach yourself first. So the question we need to ask ourselves as we come to these passages is, what is God teaching us through this passage? What does he want us to learn?

What does he want us to gain? What does he want us to hear for us today in Hong Kong? What is it that he wants us to apply to our lives? Paul says religious people come to church, they listen and they go, well, that was really cool, good illustration, great music.

And then they walk away. And nothing changes in their life. And he warns you. And he warns me that if we're not careful, we're going to be hollow.

[19:32] And we're going to be judged. In verses 21 and 22, he makes some very strong accusations, especially to the leaders of his time. They're the same things that the Jewish guy prayed at in what Jesus said in Luke 18.

He says, Paul's saying here that if you're religious, all you do is you think about the outside, but you never think about your heart.

You never realize what's going on in your heart. You never realize the idols and the things that we cling to. So we ask the question, do you steal? I mean, I'm talking just outwardly.

You go to the office and grab a whole bunch of pens with watermark on them. And we're going, where are all the watermark pens? They're given to you so that you can hand them to other people and they can do that.

But do we steal? I mean, do we look at our hands and we say no? But do we dare look at our hearts? I mean, if we're husbands, do we steal from our families?

[20:49] I mean, yeah, we have to be gone. We have to be these certain amount of times. Our work demands these things. That's great. I understand that. I totally understand that. I think that's right. But when we're home, are we present for our kids?

I mean, when we're home and work is gone, do we spend time with them? Are we on the Blackberry or playing computer games or doing something like I do?

Do we steal from our families? I mean, do we steal from work? I mean, think about it. When you go to work on Monday, are you giving your work and your boss the best that you can give them?

I mean, is your heart 100% into what you're doing? And you're saying, I'm here to honor the Lord and to serve my boss and to serve the company? Do we steal from ourselves?

And God has given us all these talents and these gifts in our bodies, in our health, in our time.

[21:59] Are we making good use of those? Do we steal from God? I mean, the passages say that all we're to do is to worship Him and to come and give Him all the praise and the honor.

But do we do that? I mean, are there things in our life that we take away for ourselves and we put them off because this is for me, this is important? And when we do that, are we taking away from God?

Paul's saying, be really, really careful because all of us have this problem and this problem in our heart is called religion. And as religious people, we just look at the law and we look at how it deals with things on the outside, but we never look inwardly.

We never look at our self-centeredness. We never look at our idols. We never look at the hypocrisy in our heart. And if we don't do that, we're in trouble. When Moses got given the Ten Commandments and he said, do not steal, that wasn't just one law.

It was a part of a whole big set of laws and rules and heart issues. And the issue was, are we going to not envy also? Do we envy?

[23:14] When a person gets that promotion and we should have got it, how do we respond? When the person gets a new whatever and you wanted it, how do we respond?

And Paul says, all of these things point to our heart and all of these things show us that we have a problem. And the problem is called that we're religious. Verse 23 and 24 says this, and this is the sad thing.

It says, you who boast in the law, through your breaking the law, do you dishonor God? For the name of God is blasphemed. The word in Greek is abused, thrown through the dung among the Gentiles because of you, just as it's written.

So when we as religious people have all these standards, we're going to do these things, we're going to perform, we're telling everybody else to perform and do all these things. When we don't do them, when we fail, because Paul says we're going to fail because we're just looking outwardly, we're not looking at our heart.

When we fail, Paul says we dishonor God. Do we dishonor God? What would you do if someone from church came to your office tomorrow and they start asking people about the church?

[24 : 32] What would they say about Watermark? What would you do if someone met somebody in your office and they started asking questions about you?

Well, tell me, what kind of person is, I see Colin back here, two Collins, or what kind of person is Christina? What would they say? How does Melanie do her work in the office?

I mean, is she a good employee? Does she honor you by the time and the talents that you've given her and in the time that she spent there? Paul says as religious people, if we try to live religious lives, we're always going to fail.

And the downside of that is that we dishonor God and God's name gets hurt. Paul has one more thing. So we talked about 17 to 24. He's talking about inwardly things, things that are true of us, things that we hold on as religious people, things that we say, these are the things that we value, this is what gives me identity, this is what gives me meaning.

He says if you follow those things, you're going to fail. He says one more thing. He says verse 25 to 29. He says there's an outward thing. And this outward thing is a ritual. This outward thing is something that you do and the more you do it, you feel like, oh, this is great, I'm doing good and God is happy with me and God is pleased with me.

[25 : 51] And for the Jew, the ritual was circumcision. Now I wanted to do a PowerPoint, but people said I couldn't do it. And my wife said, be very careful how you talk about circumcision because you're going to get in trouble. So I'm going to be very careful.

But in Genesis, the first book of the Bible, God comes to Moses and he makes a covenant with him. And in Genesis 15, part of that covenant is that God cuts these animals and he puts them off to the side and Moses and God walk between the animals.

And the animals and what they represent is a symbolism of what would happen to us or to Moses if he were to break that covenant. It would mean that he would be separated.

He'd be cut off. He'd be pushed aside. It was incredibly bloody. It was incredibly painful. The animals were screaming. It was something you didn't want to experience. In Genesis 17, God comes to Abraham and he makes him circumcise himself.

Again, it was a symbol of a covenant. It was something that had already happened inside. God had already come into Abraham's heart and changed Abraham's heart. And part of this change was a symbol of an outward, this is who I am.

[27 : 06] And God brought circumcision on that scene. It was a cutting and a separation of a part of Abraham. And it was to remind Abraham every time he had to shall be in or go to the bathroom or whatever he did, every time he looked down there, he reminded himself of the covenant that God made with him.

But he didn't just remind himself of the covenant that God made with him. He reminded himself that this is what was going to happen to him if he broke that relationship. That he'd be cut off. He would be separated.

There'd be pain. And it would be a really bad thing. Circumcision. In Jesus' day, in Paul's day, the Jews had taken circumcision to this huge, huge level.

So it wasn't just a covenant. They didn't think about the heart. All they thought about was the outside. If you have it, it's like a tattoo. If you have it, you're in. And so they just circumcised themselves.

And it came to a point where the rabbis were teaching that if you are circumcised, you will go to heaven. He says, if you are circumcised, Father Abraham is standing at the gates of hell and he's not going to let anybody enter into hell who's circumcised.

[28 : 12] And so they've taken this idea of a covenant, an inward change, an outward expression, and they just made it something outward. And they said, if you do this, God's going to be happy.

He's going to be pleased. It's going to happen. You're going to be okay. Today, we do it with things like baptism and communion.

And we say, if you are baptized, you're going to go to heaven. You know there are churches in Hong Kong that preach that if you are baptized, you're going to heaven for sure.

And Paul says in this passage in Romans, that's not true. That's not true. That's not true. That's an outward expression of an inward reality. If the inward reality hasn't happened, then the outward expression means nothing. He says, even if you've been circumcised or even if you've been baptized, if you're living a life that doesn't match up to the covenant, that it's basically you become uncircumcised.

You become unbaptized. Now, we're not going to have people getting baptized again and forth and back. But what he's saying is, it's a heart issue. And don't do things unless your heart is changed.

[29 : 20] And religion cannot change your heart. Being religious inwardly, being religious outwardly, they cannot change you.

You are lost. And Paul is talking to the most powerful, most influential people in the culture. And they sat there and they're going, oh my gosh. There's no hope.

What hope do I have? What can I do? And Paul says, nothing. Have a nice day.

See why Romans chapter 1, 2, and 3 is such a cheery passage? Paul is teaching this to us so that we can understand how bad off we are. There's going to be some of us who are going to be moralist.

I've done this. I've done that. I haven't done this. I'm okay. There's going to be some of us who are going to say, I don't know if there's a God. If there's a God, I don't care. I'm going to do my own thing. And if God comes to me one day, I'm going to say, hey, you're unfair. You're unjust. I can do this. And who cares?

[30 : 19] And there's going to be some of us who are going to say, I believe in God. I want to please Him. I want to do the right things. I'm going to study my Bible. I'm going to do these things. I'm going to do these things. I'm going to do this and do that and do this and all these things. And all these things are true of me. And in the end, Paul says, all of those people are lost.

They've all failed. There's no hope in and of themselves. Have a nice day.

Paul was trying to show you and me that in and of ourselves, we're doomed.

In and of ourselves, we're lost. But I don't want to end here because you're going to be depressed because chapter three and chapter four are coming.

But you know, if you don't understand how bad things are, you never appreciate how good things really are. If you don't understand how bad our heart is, then when we say things like, God loves you, God saves you, that means nothing to a person who's 85% good.

[31 : 29] But to a person who is 100% lost, and they understand that in their heart, there's nothing, nothing, nothing they can do, nothing that can make them happy, nothing they can put to God to make them feel, oh, you're doing well, to that type of person, then God's love, God's grace, God's mercy, it's amazing.

It's amazing. One last thing. Verse 29. But he is a Jew inwardly, in circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter of the law, and his praise is not from men, but from God.

What is he saying here? He's saying that there's going to be any hope, any hope, any heart change, anything that's going to change in us, God has to do it.

Colossians 2, verses 9 through 13. Listen to this, and we'll close. For in him, the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form.

In Christ, you have been made complete. He is the head over all rule and authority. In him, you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands in the removal of the body.

[33 : 04] My eyes are going out. The removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ. You have been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with him through faith in the working of God.

In him, the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism. What is he saying there? He's saying this. Our only hope is if God steps in, and on the cross, Christ stepped in.

You and I had a covenant with God. This covenant meant separation and death if we broke the covenant. We broke the covenant. Christ did not break the covenant.

And Colossians says that on the cross, Christ was circumcised for our sin.

Christ was cut off and removed and thrown away for our sin. And because of Christ being cut off, thrown away, and removed because of our sin, Colossians says that God has come in with his spirit into our heart, and he has given us a new heart.

[34 : 27] Romans 1, 2, and 3, everybody's trying to get the new heart on themselves. And at the end, Paul says, you know, no matter how moral you are, no matter how good you are, no matter how religious you are, no matter how perfect you are, you're never going to change your heart.

Your heart has to be circumcised by something you cannot do. Colossians says, on the cross, Christ died, he was cut away, he was bloodied, he was beaten, it was terrible, it was a terrible sound, it was something awful, terrible.

Okay. When Kip was born, immediately, I started asking the physician, can I be there for the circumcision? There's just something about it, I want it, I've read about it, as a pastor, I'm reading about it, I thought it was something I wanted to see, it's part of the covenant, it's part of all these things, I said, can I see this?

And he goes, no. He goes, I go, why? He goes, well, there's blood, there's screaming, it's painful, the only man I ever allowed to see his son do that, the minute the cut happened, the guy passed out, hit his head, and the nurses were working on him instead of the kid.

He says, that it's so gruesome, and so uncontrollably, whoa, you don't want to see that. And the passage says that when Christ was crucified, it was so gruesome, it was so bloody, it was so loud, he was being cut off, he said, my God, my God, why have you cut me off?

[36 : 06] And the passage says, he did it because of you. He did it for Tobin.

He did it for Colin. He did it for Christina. He did it for Charles. He did it for everyone. So that by his son being cut off, you and I are given new hearts.

He did it for him. And we can call him father and be his children. You understand where Paul's going? He's trying to make it hard, difficult, not focused on yourself, not focused on yourself.

It's impossible. It's impossible. Chapter three, it's going to be hard. Chapter four, God. And what he's trying to show us is as his people, the only hope we have of changing our lives is by God reaching into our heart and changing it.

Father, we thank you for this day. We thank you for your word. We thank you for your word that's living and active. We pray as we ponder and think about what these ideas of being religious is.

[37 : 19] I confess, Lord, that I am the religious person. And I think that there are probably many of us like that in this congregation.

Help us to read your word. Help us to pray on it. Help us to understand what it means to not be religious. Lord, I pray that we would just confess our religiosity, if that's even a word, that we would realize that the gospel message and truth is that man is lost whether he ignores you, whether he chooses to be perfect and good and gets everything done, or whether he says, I'm going to be very religious and I'm going to do everything I should do as a religious person.

But the message of Romans is that religion can't save us. Only relationship with God can save us. Father, I pray for those of us in here who are not on that journey yet.

We're here by friends and we wonder what the heck's going on and why this guy's jumping around in a not blue shirt. I pray, Father, for their hearts. I pray for those of us who brought them that we would just continue to live lives that are consistent and be mindful of verse 24 that if we try to live religiously and morally when we fail, everybody else looks at God and they laugh.

Nietzsche said the greatest testimony against God and Jesus is his people in their lives. And I pray, Lord, that that would not be true of us.

[38 : 52] Help us to be humble. Help us to be gentle. Help us to realize that we all have aspects of morality, religion, and I just don't care in our lives and you're continually showing those to us.

Give us the courage to confess those things, to repent of those things and allow your spirit to change us. And Lord, I pray for this message as we think about it this week.

I hope that we just don't walk out of here but we ponder what it means. We ponder what it means to steal. We ponder what it means to walk with you. We ponder what it means to be good singles and neighbors and workers and husbands and wives and help us to ponder that we can only do that through your power and through your strength.

We need you to change us, Lord. We pray as a church that you would use us in mighty ways as we think about the pastors being trained up and the church planters and the new churches being planted. And it's not to our praise and it's not to watermarks, wow, look at them, but it's to your glory and to your honor.

And so we give it to you knowing that you have to move and do incredible things for people to be changed. Father, again, we come before you and we thank you that you didn't leave us.

[40 : 09] That when we ran away you pursued us. That you're the God of second chances. I know that there are many of us in here who need to hear that today because we've lost our first chance and we don't realize that you're pursuing us even now with your son.

Father, we thank you most of all that you allowed your son to hang on a cross to take our punishment. That he would be separated. That he would be cast off. That he would be bloodied. That he would be beaten. That he would be killed so that we didn't have to be. So that we can take his separation and apply that to our heart and your spirit changes us and gives us new hearts.

So Lord, we come before you and we just are in awe of your mercy and your grace and your love and your righteousness and your justice. We love you and we pray these things in your son Jesus' holy name.

Amen.