

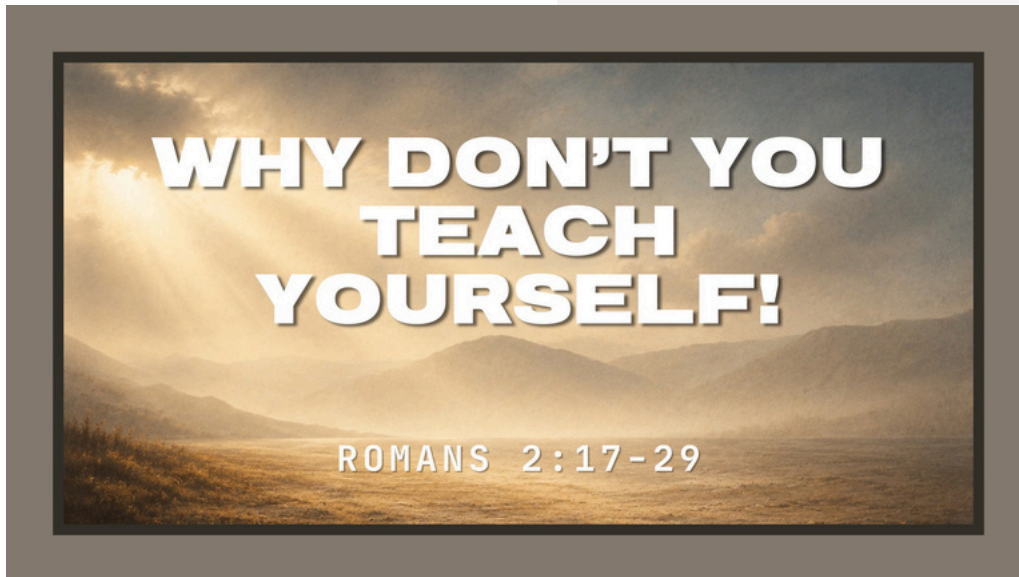
CCLEB SERMON

NOTES

SUNDAY JULY 5, 2026
ROMANS 2:17-29

PASTOR DUANE MILLER

WHY DON'T YOU TEACH YOURSELF!



Story of misplaced trust. When I was about junior-high age, living in Brazil, I was riding bikes with my friend Nathan when we spotted a giant wasp's nest hanging in a tree near his house. Now, a wasp's nest is terribly tempting for any boy with a homemade slingshot in his back pocket – and that was us. So we did what we would soon live to regret: we positioned ourselves at what we thought was a safe distance and launched a barrage of rocks at the nest. Only after we had each been stung several times did we realize our "safe distance" was not nearly far enough. We trusted that distance to keep us safe, and it did not. That is misplaced trust.



Romans is a carefully staged argument. Paul is not only writing strong theology – salvation, repentance, righteousness – but thru that, he is persuading the Roman Christians to embrace one unified gospel that brings Jews and Gentiles together in Christ.

This matters because the church in Rome in AD 57 was divided along ethnic lines. From the Jewish Christian side it was Jews versus Gentiles; from the Roman side it was the civilized versus the barbarians.

Paul's mission is to convince them all that both Jews and Gentiles, civilized and barbarian – stand together under the one gospel of Jesus Christ, and that under that gospel they ought to be unified, not divided.

Paul's main argument of Romans.

(Romans 1:16-17)

1. The gospel is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes.
2. The gospel tells us how God makes everyone right in His sight – by faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Note “everyone”.

From **Romans 1:18 to 3:20** Paul establishes the universal need for the Gospel. Bottom line: Everyone needs Jesus!!

Romans Outline

1. Main Argument / Thesis — Romans 1:16-17
2. Universal Need for the Gospel — Romans 1:18-3:20
Everyone needs Jesus
3. God's Saving Action — Romans 3:21-5:21
4. Freedom and Life in the Spirit — Romans 6:1-8:39
5. Israel in God's Plan — Romans 9:1-11:36
6. Transformed - Unified Communal Life — Romans 12:1-15:13
7. Paul's Mission Appeal — Romans 15:14-16:27

In **Romans 1:18-32** we saw that those who reject and suppress the truth, and refuse to worship God, end up in wickedness and immorality. **Verse 32** says this of them: "they know that God's justice requires those who do these things deserve to die..." – meaning they know God's judgment applies to them. Both the Jewish Christians and the Greek Christians in Rome would agree that such judgment is deserved.

But in **Romans 2:1-16** Paul turns that agreement against them: in condemning others, they condemn themselves, for they are just as deserving of God's judgment.

Paul argues that this judgment comes equally to Jew and Gentile, because God shows no partiality.

But Paul also reveals a God who shows "wonderful kindness, patience, and tolerance," welcoming and accepting the repentant heart. For the unrepentant heart, however, the end is a day when God's righteous judgment is revealed.

And that day is harsh. Paul describes it with words like "terrible punishment," "day of anger," "wrath," "trouble and calamity," and "destroyed."

Paul's point to these divided Jews and Gentiles is that God is impartial – he treats all alike. If they repent, Jew or Gentile, they will find a "wonderfully kind, patient, tolerant" God. If they refuse to repent, Jew or Gentile, they will meet a "day of judgment." Again, God is impartial.

In today's passage, **Romans 2:17-29**, Paul speaks specifically to the Jews who have misplaced trust— and remember, Paul himself is Jewish. These Jewish Christians still need to be convinced of their need for the gospel of Jesus Christ alone for salvation. Think this through - if a person is not convinced of their need for the gospel to save them from God's judgment, then their trust for salvation rests in something else. That is what we are calling "misplaced trust."

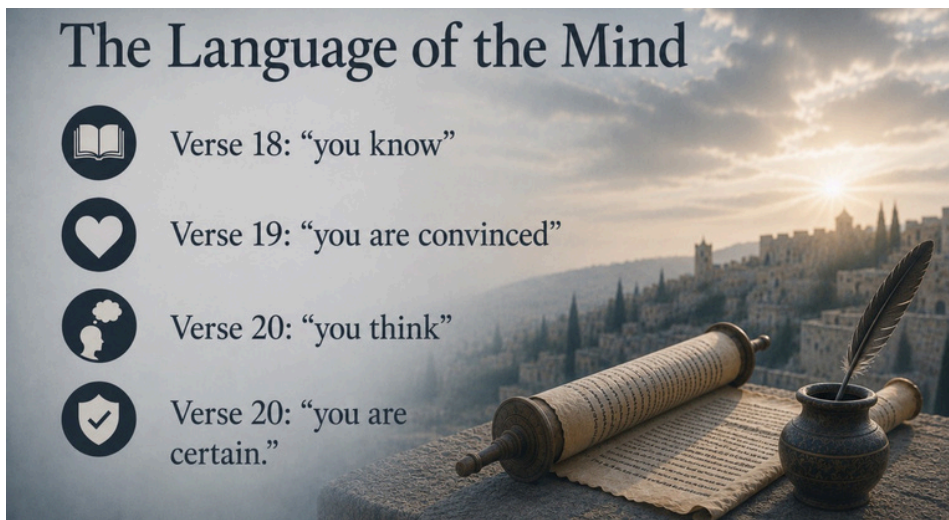
For the Jews, that misplaced trust was in their religion – and they took great pride in it. In **verse 17** Paul itemizes where their trust lies, which is what they take pride in. They are Jews by birth, they possess the law (the Torah), and they believe this gives them a special, unique relationship with God that sets them apart from every other people. After all, they are Jews – God's chosen people.



Verse 18 tells us they believe that, because they have been given the law and taught the law, they know God's will and can discern right from wrong. That is quite a claim. They think the Jews alone have this special, inside relationship with God through the law, and that the rest of the world does not.

Because of that pride, **verse 19** tells us they "are convinced they are a guide for the blind and a light for people lost in darkness." Notice the arrogance – it is almost a "savior complex." In direct contrast, hear what Jesus the true Saviour said in **John 14:6**. And Paul says these Jews take it one step further in **Romans 2:20**.

Notice that Paul is exposing the Jews' "thinking errors" – the lies they believe. Watch the language of the mind.



And these thinking errors – these lies – are propped up by pride and rooted in misplaced trust: the belief that simply because they are Jews who possess the law, they have a special relationship with God.

Let me give you a few illustrations to capture what Paul is describing. It's like a person with a coveted platinum membership to an elite gym – personal trainers, massages, VIP parking. He brags about that membership for years, yet he has never once worked out. He is badly out of shape, but proud of the card. The membership was never the point; the training was. Apply that to Romans: having the law is not the same as living it. The Jews held the membership but skipped the workout.

Here's another illustration. It's like a beautiful leather Bible – gold-edged, your name embossed on the front – displayed proudly in the living room, sometimes read or studied. The owner shows it to every guest, yet is never changed by it. Paul says of the Jews, "You have the law and are taught the law" – but possession is not obedience.

So Paul challenges them with three questions – a three-punch combination. He says in **verse 21-22**. He is exposing their hypocrisy: if they have the law, and know God's will, and know what is right, why doesn't it show up in their own lives?

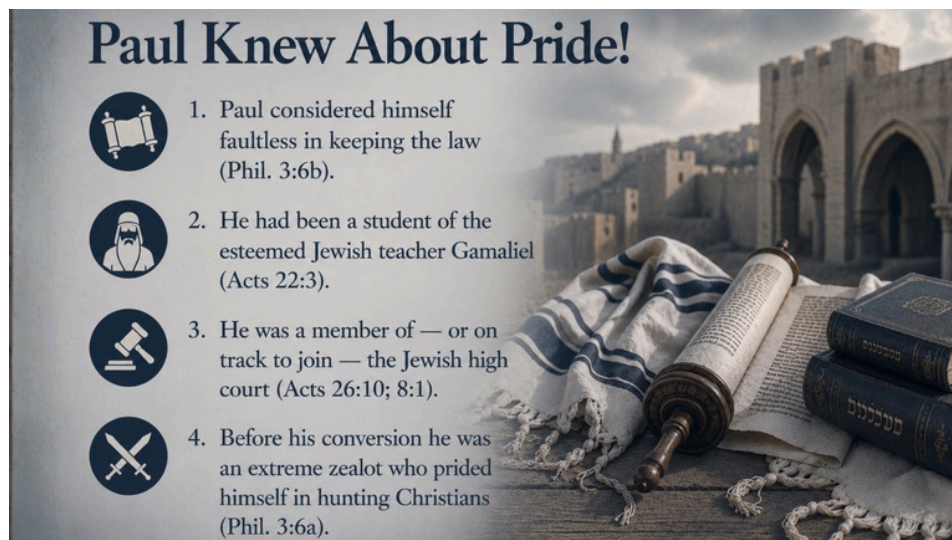
Paul drives it home with one question – "why don't you teach yourself?" Here is what that question means. Suppose you run your own driving school. You teach the classroom portion flawlessly – every question a student asks, you have the right answer. Then you take them out in the car and coach them well: "Keep two hands on the wheel." "Leave a four-second gap." "No texting." "Don't treat stop signs as optional, like Pastor Duane does." You teach them so well that they all pass their driving test on the first try. A month later, one of your students posts a video to your driving school's Facebook page. She had been driving behind you, recognized you, and started recording. The video shows you – the instructor – driving terribly: speeding, blowing through stop signs, one hand on a coffee and the other on a cell phone, doing everything you told your students never to do. The title of her video? "Why don't you teach yourself to drive?"

That is Paul in **Romans 2:21**. He is aware of the Jews' behavior in Rome, he sees the hypocrisy, and he says, "Teacher, why don't you teach yourself?"

Yes, the Jews have the law. Yes, the law tells them what God wants. Yes, they are teachers of the law. But they do not keep it themselves – at least not perfectly.

In **verse 23** Paul suggests that pride is behind all of this. No surprise – is there any sin that pride is not involved in? Someone has said, "Pride is the birthplace of sin."

In fact, the Greek word for "pride" in **verse 23** is the same word translated "boast" in **verse 17**. Paul is clearly aware of the pride at work in their thinking. And Paul, being a Jew himself, knew this pride intimately. Look at how much it shaped him before he followed Christ.



Paul Knew About Pride!

1. Paul considered himself faultless in keeping the law (Phil. 3:6b).
2. He had been a student of the esteemed Jewish teacher Gamaliel (Acts 22:3).
3. He was a member of — or on track to join — the Jewish high court (Acts 26:10; 8:1).
4. Before his conversion he was an extreme zealot who prided himself in hunting Christians (Phil. 3:6a).

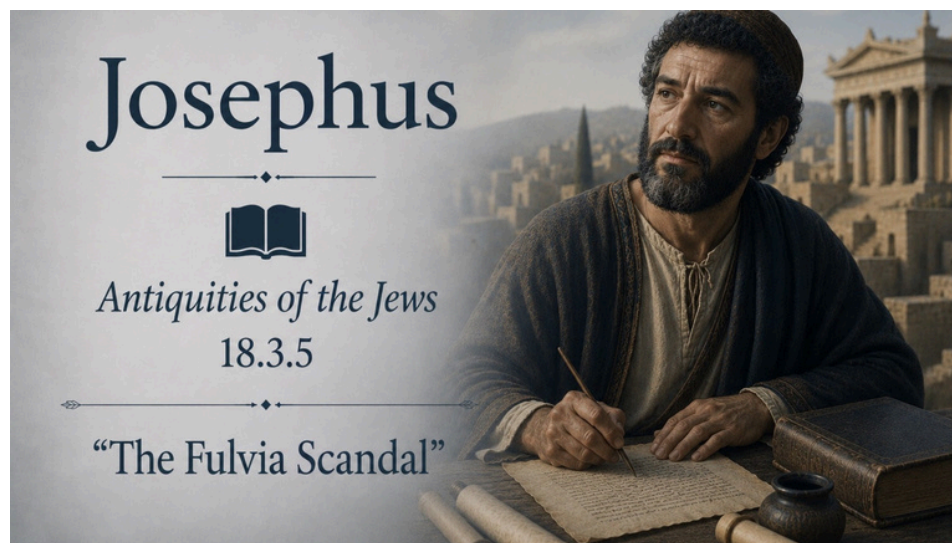
So if anyone understands the pride in Jewish thinking, it is Paul. Even after Paul became a follower of Jesus, Paul still wrestled with pride. He wrote verses like these: Regarding the thorn in his flesh, he wrote **2 Corinthians 12:7**

Galatians 6:14: "As for me, may I never boast..." So Paul knows firsthand how pride can distort a person's thinking.

Now let's play devil's advocate for a moment. Paul has just accused them of stealing, adultery, robbing temples, and generally breaking God's law. How does he know this? Well, Paul was a Jew himself and a Pharisee, remember? He had a front-row seat to the behavior of other Jews – and perhaps to his own.

There may also be a specific historical incident behind his words "do you rob temples?" at the end of **verse 23**.

According to Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews* 18.3.5), during the reign of Tiberius (AD 14–37) four Jewish men persuaded Fulvia, a wealthy Roman woman interested in Judaism, to donate gold and purple cloth supposedly for the Temple in Jerusalem. Instead, they kept it for themselves. When the fraud came to light, Tiberius moved against the whole Jewish community in Rome – Josephus says about 4,000 Jews were deported to Sardinia and others were expelled from the city.



Whatever the event was, it was a national embarrassment – serious enough for Paul to say what he says in **Romans 2:24**. That is a quote from **Isaiah 52:5**. Imagine the impact of Paul quoting that verse to Jewish Christians!

Paul then continues his assault on their pride by challenging the Jewish sign of the covenant – circumcision. For those unfamiliar, circumcision was the covenant sign given to Abraham. Abraham and every Jewish male after him was circumcised to show that they were set apart for a covenant life of faith with God.

And consider this: the very part of the body Abraham used to father a child through Hagar – which was an act of unbelief, refusing to wait on God to fulfill his promise of a son, is the very part that is circumcised as the sign of a life set apart for belief in covenant with God. Some might call that poetic justice. :)

And yet this is the very circumcision, the sign of the covenant, that the Christian Jews were trying to impose on Gentile believers.

So in **verse 25** Paul asks, in effect: what is the point of circumcision if you don't keep God's law? Paul says, By breaking the law, you circumcised Jews are no better off than the uncircumcised Gentiles.

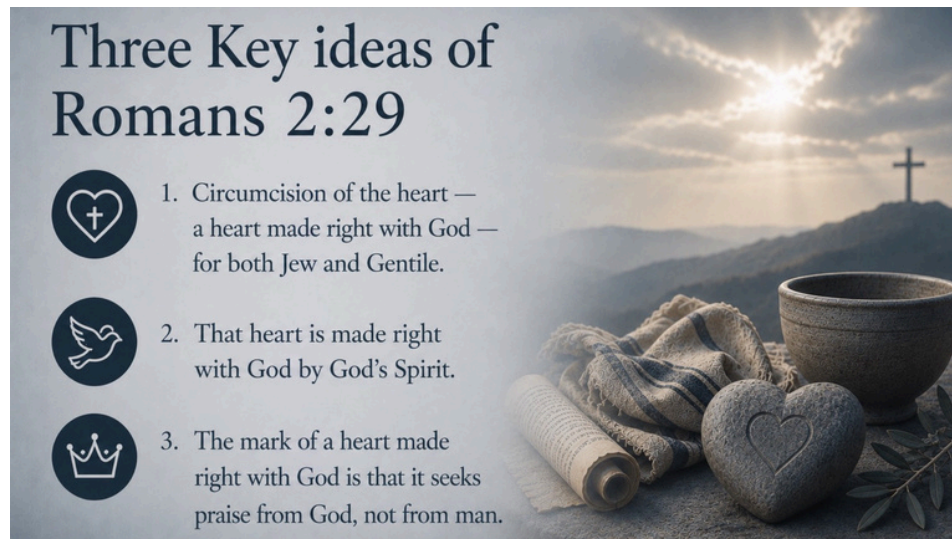
Then in **verses 26–27** Paul adds: if an uncircumcised Gentile keeps God's law, God will count him as one of his own people. That was a crushing blow to Jewish pride – they believed they alone were God's people.

Paul goes further with his argument, and says the uncircumcised Gentile who keeps the law will condemn the circumcised Jew who does not.

So what is Paul doing here? Paul is establishing a common denominator for Jew and Gentile in their relationship with God. As we saw last week, God is not partial. He judges Jew and Gentile alike, and he offers his salvation and righteousness to all alike.

In **verses 28-29** Paul explains God's impartiality further. Both Jew and Gentile can have an equal relationship with God when circumcision is applied to the heart. God is not interested in circumcision of the flesh; God wants a circumcised heart.

What is a circumcised heart? Paul gives us three clues. Notice what Paul says about the heart in **verses 28-29**.



Note the phrase "made right with God." We have heard that language before – in Paul's main argument, **Romans 1:17**.

God is the one who makes us right in his sight. And from start to finish, for Jew and Gentile alike, that happens by faith in Jesus Christ alone.

All that matters is God declaring you righteous in his sight.

So let me bring this home. When my friend and I stood in that yard launching rocks at the nest, we were confident we were at a safe distance. Our confidence didn't matter one bit – the wasps still found us. Our trust was real, but it was misplaced. And misplaced trust always comes due.

That is Paul's warning to the Jews, and it is his warning to us. You can hold the platinum membership and never work out. You can own the beautiful Bible and even memorize it, but if it doesn't change you? What's the point? You can teach the law and never let the law teach you. You can be religious, moral, respectable, and know all the right answers – and still be trusting in the wrong thing for the one thing that matters most.

So here is the question Paul leaves ringing in the Roman Christians ears, and in ours: Where does your trust lie for standing right before God? Is it in your heritage or tradition? Your church attendance? Your good behavior? The fact that you grew up in this? Every one of those is a "safe distance" that is not nearly distant enough.

Because Paul strips away every prop until only one thing is left standing: God declares righteous the person who comes to him by faith in Jesus Christ. Not the circumcised, but the circumcised in heart. Not the one praised by men, but the one whose praise comes from God. Not the one who merely has the law, but the one whose heart has been made new by the Spirit.

So don't be the teacher who won't teach himself. Don't display the Bible and stay unchanged. Don't trust the distance and get stung.

Let God do what only God can do – take your heart, make it right with him, and clothe you in a righteousness that was never yours to earn but is Christ's to give.

Ezekiel 36:26. God gives the new heart, it is not something you and can achieve.

And that is exactly what the communion table is about. It is not a table for people who have it all together – it is a table for people who have stopped trusting themselves and started trusting Christ. So come to it this morning with a circumcised heart, seeking the praise that comes from God and not from man.

BONUS

CONTENT:

Diatribes: A diatribe is a rhetorical device from Greek philosophy in which a writer or speaker argues with an imaginary opponent – raising that opponent's objections and then answering them. This “anticipate-and-refute” move is the heart of diatribe. Its purpose was to teach, exhort, and persuade, not to destroy. The speaker gives voice to an idealized wrong position, engages it directly, and exposes where its logic breaks down. Paul uses this technique throughout Romans, including here in **chapter 2**.

Philippians 3:6 “...I obeyed the law without fault”. Meaning from a peer reviewed perspective in keeping the law, Paul was found to be flawless. That is quite a feat in a Pharisee environment.

Isaiah 52:5 quote: the **Isaiah 52:5** quote is from the Septuagint and thus our Bibles won't have the "among the gentiles" phrasing.

Romans 2:28 Circumcision of the heart. According to the IVP Bible Background Commentary, p.419 – the Rabbis commented little on circumcision of the heart, but Paul makes it a central argument.

A circumcised heart is not new a concept. Several place in the Old Testament mention this. **Deuteronomy 10:6, Deuteronomy 30:6, and Jeremiah 4:4.**

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