

PRACTICING WHAT WE PREACH
ROMANS 2:17-29

BIG IDEA: GOD IS PASSIONATE ABOUT SPIRITUAL AUTHENTICITY, NOT PEDIGREE.

THE CONTEXTUAL TIE-IN: ...Paul insists that their [Jews] privileges do not exempt them from God's judgment....Paul argues that neither knowledge of the law nor physical circumcision has value unless the law is obeyed....[Paul's] point in this section is not to demonstrate that Jews commit sins (no Jew would deny that) but that these sins, despite possession of the law and circumcision, make Jews just as liable to God's judgment as Gentiles....Paul insists that it is faith—only and always—that is the basis for a righteous standing with God. Therefore, the “signs” of election—the law and circumcision—are of no value without this faith. Only if the law is “done,” and, Paul implies, done perfectly, will the election on the basis of the Mosaic covenant be of value to the Jew.... (Douglas J. Moo, 158)

CENTRIPETAL VS. CENTRIFUGAL

THE WAY IT'S SUPPOSED TO WORK: *WHAT OTHER NATION HAS SUCH GREAT LAWS?*

- **Deuteronomy 4:5-9** *See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. ⁶ Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." ⁷ What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? ⁸ And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today? ⁹ Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.*
- **Psalms 147:19-20** *He has revealed his word to Jacob, his laws and decrees to Israel. ²⁰ He has done this for no other nation; they do not know his laws. Praise the LORD.*

INSIGHTS:

- **ONE:** Our culture has a blinding effect on us.
- **TWO:** We need to find periodic vantage points from where we can view ourselves more objectively.
- **THREE:** We profit from regular self-inspections.
- **FOUR:** Never rest on our laurels--Teaching is a character profession—bad plumbing/example.
- **FIVE:** Be forewarned: We are far more susceptible to externalism than we are aware.
- **SIX:** Our witness needs to be far more than just words:

--UNPACKING IT--

- **ONE:** Our culture has a blinding effect on us.
 - What we don't know *can* hurt us.
 - Cf. the Seven Churches of Asia
 - I suspect that all seven of these churches thought they were doing commendably well in the eyes of Jesus. But fully five of the seven were at risk of being shut down or disciplined by Jesus.
 - Ephesus [NEGATIVE]
 - Commendation:
 - *Your deeds*
 - *Your hard work*
 - *Your perseverance*
 - *Intolerance of wicked men*
 - *Testing of those claiming to be apostles and finding them false*
 - *Endurance of hardships for name of Christ*
 - *Not growing weary*

- *You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans*
 - Antagonism (*Yet, I hold this against you...*)
 - *You have forsaken your first love.*
- Smyrna [POSITIVE]
 - Commendation:
 - *Your afflictions and your poverty*
 - *The slander from the Jews*
 - Antagonism (*Yet, I hold this against you...*)
 - NONE
- Pergamum [NEGATIVE]
 - Commendation:
 - *Remaining true to Jesus name, even though you live where Satan has his throne, and even though Antipas was martyred there*
 - Antagonism (*I will fight against them with the sword of my mouth...*)
 - *Some of you hold to the teaching of Balaam (enticement to eating food sacrificed to idols and sexual immorality)*
 - *Some hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans*
- Thyatira [NEGATIVE]
 - Commendation:
 - *Your deeds*
 - *Your love and faith*
 - *Your service and perseverance*
 - *You are doing more than you did at first*
 - Antagonism (*I will repay each of you according to your deeds...*)
 - *You tolerate Jezebel who calls herself a prophetess and entices my servants into sexual immorality and eating food sacrificed to idols.*
- Sardis [NEGATIVE]
 - Commendation:
 - *Your deeds*
 - Antagonism (*If you do not wake up I will come like a thief...*)
 - *You have a reputation for being alive, but you are dead.*
- Philadelphia [POSITIVE]
 - Commendation:
 - *Your deeds*
 - *You have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.*
 - *Endured patiently*
 - Antagonism
 - NONE
- Laodicea [NEGATIVE]
 - Commendation:
 - *Your deeds*
 - Antagonism (*Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline.*)
 - *Lukewarm*
 - *You are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked*
- Some of the parables get under our skin with uncomfortable self-discoveries.
 - Sower and soils—Matthew 13:3-8; 18-23; Mark 4:3-8, 14-20; Luke 8:5-8, 11-15.
 - Hidden Treasure AND valuable pearl—Matthew 13:44-46
 - Fig Tree—Matthew 24:32-35; Mark 13:28-29; Luke 21:29-31
 - Faithful and wise servant—Matthew 24:45-51
 - Talents—Matthew 25:14-30
 - Rich fool—Luke 12:16-21
 - Cost of discipleship—Luke 14:28-33

- Persistent widow—Luke 18:2-8
- **TWO:** We need to find periodic vantage points from where we can view ourselves more objectively.
 - **TO A LOUSE ON SEEING ONE ON A LADY'S BONNET AT CHURCH** by the Poet 'Laureate' of Scotland, Robert Burns (1759-1796).

*O Jenny, dinna toss your head,
An' set your beauties a' abroad!
You little ken what cursed speed
The blastie's makin!
Thae winks an' finger-ends, I dread,
Are notice takin'!*

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

*O Jenny do not toss your head,
And set your beauties all abroad!
You little know what cursed speed
The blastie's making!
Those winks and finger-ends, I dread,
Are notice taking!*

*O would some Power the gift to 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!*
 - Where do we find such vantage (Cf. **Hobbit climbing a tree**)
 - Reading missionary biographies
 - Interviewing missionaries
 - Ask them how the USA has changed in the past 4-10 years
 - Ask what they think of American Christianity upon arriving back here.
 - Take a Third World missions trip.
 - Visit (volunteer at) one of the Gospel Missions.
 - Read *Christianity Today*
- **THREE:** We profit from regular self-inspections.
 - **ILLUS: Les Schwab visits:**
 - Tire inspections—shocks and alignment)
 - Brake inspections
 - Ball joints
 - **Read the Bible/LISTEN TO SERMONS**, and ask this question:
 - *What might God want to change in me?*
 - **Then, take action! James 1:22-25**, *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. ²³ Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵ But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it-- he will be blessed in what he does.*

- *Adultery and racism are today’s big sins, but many bother traditionally condemnable vices have fallen off the list in recent years. In fact, some theologians fear the concept of personal sin is almost lost.*

When Pope Benedict XVI said at Easter that in the contemporary world, “the notion of sin” is jeopardized, he got some amens from Protestant pastors as well.

Presbyterian Tim Keller still preaches about sin, but with lots of explanation “because the word is essentially obsolete,” Keller says. His three New York City congregations are mostly young and single. “They do get the idea of branding, of taking a word or term and filling it with your own content, so I have to rebrand the word sin.”

One starting place is what qualifies as sin these days. A survey by Ellison Research shows that 87 percent of U.S. adults still acknowledge the concept of sin, but what is “almost always wrong” is changing:

- *Cheating on your spouse? Wrong. (81% call it a sin.)*
- *Sex before marriage? Not so wrong (45%)*
- *Racism? Wrong. (74%)*
- *Gambling? Hardly wrong at all. (30%)*

Of his Manhattan setting Keller says, “Around here [sin] means self-centeredness, the acorn from which it all grows. Individually, that means ‘I live for myself, for my own glory and happiness, tearing the net of interwovenness, the fabric of humanity.’”

So sin, as a list of acts offensive to God first and foremost, is difficult to sell. As a self-centered posture, you’ve got more traction. All the more important when proclaiming salvation in Christ alone.¹

- **FOUR:** Never rest on our laurels--Teaching is a character profession—**bad plumbing/example.**
 - **MORRIS:** , 108, *The Jew seems to have combined two attitudes, one which stressed the community and the other the individual. He thought of his nation as the community of the saved. When he stood before God it was not simply as an individual, to be dealt with on the grounds of his personal record in keeping or not keeping the law. He belonged to God’s own people and would be saved along with the rest of that people. His circumcision placed him firmly within the saved community. He might be punished for his sins, but he would not be eternally lost, for “All Israelites have a share in the world to come” (Sanh. 10:1)*
- **FIVE:** Be forewarned: We are far more **susceptible** to externalism than we are aware.
- **SIX:** Our witness needs to be far more than just words:
 - Startle Reflex
 - Jesus’ Balance of Goods Words and Good Works (see attached)

TRUTH RESPONSE COMMITMENTS—I WILL HONESTLY TEACH MYSELF:

1. I WILL NOT STEAL

- Extra change/undercharge
- Declare all forms of income—tips, gratuities
- Family inheritance disputes
- Alzheimer parent financial abuses
- Abusing coupons (limit one per family)
- Gambling—*legal theft from others with their consent.*
- Chuck Swindoll: *Not a pencil or a paperclip.*
- **[SWINDOLL]** *Do you put wire in walls? Do you repair cars? Do you work with numbers? Do you sell clothes? Perhaps you practice law or medicine. The important thing is not what work you do, but whether you do your work with integrity. Perhaps you labor behind the scenes, and your only thanks is the inner satisfaction of a job done right. Do you cheat on your exams? Are you cheating on your mate? Some have the audacity to do such things and call themselves Christians. No wonder the world is confused!*

¹ Adapted from *USA Today*, “Currents,” “Rebranding Sin,” *Leadership* (Fall 2008), 11.

*You want to shock the world? Start here--demonstrating the guts to do what's right when no one is looking. It takes real guts to stand strong with integrity in a culture weakened by hypocrisy. Start today.*²

2. I WILL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY

- Pornography
- Divorce and remarriage
- Living together
- Wandering eye [**EVERY MAN'S BATTLE**]
- **STATS FROM PATRICK MORLEY**³
 - *In fact, men in the church face the same challenges and frustrations as men outside the church. For example, for every ten men in the church:*
 - *Nine will have children who leave the church.*
 - *Eight will not find their jobs satisfying.*
 - *Six will pay the monthly minimum on their credit card bills.*
 - *Five will have a major problem with pornography.*
 - *Four will get divorced—affecting one million children each year.*
 - *Only one will have a biblical worldview.*
 - *All ten will struggle to balance work and family.*

3. I WILL NOT ENTERTAIN IDOLS/ROB TEMPLES

- Honor God with generous giving:
 - **Malachi 3:8**, *"Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' "In tithes and offerings.*
- Impulsive giving
- Offer left-overs to God:
 - **Malachi 1:8**, *When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?" says the LORD Almighty.*
- Not offer the Lord that which cost me nothing:
 - **2 Samuel 24:23-24**, *O king, Araunah gives all this to the king." Araunah also said to him, "May the LORD your God accept you." ²⁴ But the king replied to Araunah, "No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen and paid fifty shekels of silver for them.*
- **IRONSIDE:** "Rob temples" ...really means "to traffic in idols." This was an offense of which the Jew was particularly guilty. Abhorring images, he nevertheless was often known to act as a go-between in disposing of idols stolen from the temples of a conquered people and those ready to purchase them in other districts. He was even charged with systematically robbing temples and then selling the images. The town-clerk of Ephesus had this in mind when he said, "Ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of temples (not, churches), nor yet blasphemers of your goddess" (Acts 19:37). So this was indeed a home-thrust, exposing at once the hypocritical character of the man who professed detestation of idolatry and all its works, and yet was not above profiting financially at the expense of idolaters in a manner so thoroughly dishonest.⁴

4. I WILL NOT BREAK THE LAW

- Gossip and fighting vs. peacemaking
- Neglecting the Word of God

² Taken from Charles R. Swindoll, "A Battle for Integrity," *Insights* (March 2003): 1-2. Copyright © 2003, Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights reserved worldwide. Used with permission.

³ Patrick Morley, David Delk, and Brett Clemmer. *No Man Left Behind* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2006), 33.

⁴ H. A. Ironside, *Lectures on Romans*. 40.

- Violating teachings of stewardship regarding giving and service
 - **RON SIDER:** “U.S. evangelicals have roughly \$800 billion in after-taxes income. We spend \$8 billion on weight-reduction programs. We spend only one-fourth as much (a mere \$2 billion) on missions.”⁵
- Neglecting Christian fellowship and corporate worship
- Prayerlessness
- Favoritism—
 - **James 2:1-4,** *My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. ² Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. ³ If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," ⁴ have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?*
- Stinginess
 - **James 2:15-17,** *Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.*

HOW DO FAILURES OF THE ABOVE CONTRIBUTE TO PAGAN BLASPHEMY?

1. “Christians are no better than we are.”
2. “Christians nevertheless act superior to us”
3. “Christians are hypocrites”
4. “Christianity doesn’t make people better, it just makes them more judgmental”

CONTRA:

- **Matthew 5:14-16** *"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."*
- There isn't another institution on the planet that can do what the local church can do when it's working right.--Bill Hybels
- *When the heathen hear God's oracles on our lips they marvel at their beauty and greatness. But afterwards when they mark that our deeds are unworthy of the words we utter, they turn from this to scoffing, and say that it is a myth and a delusion.*⁶--Clement
- Michael Green well connects this loving unity to the authentication of the Church's message to the world:

*"Unless the fellowship in the Christian assembly is far superior to that which can be found anywhere else in society, then the Christians can talk about the transforming love and power of Jesus until they are hoarse, but people are not going to listen."*⁷
- **1 Peter 2:11-16** *Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. ¹² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. ¹³ Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, ¹⁴ or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. ¹⁵ For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. ¹⁶ Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.*
- *[Our U.S.] unchurched population is the largest mission field in the English-speaking world and the fifth largest globally.*

⁵ Ron Sider, *Good News and Good Works*, 188.

⁶ II Clement 13:4.

⁷ Sider. *Ibid.*, 176. Michael Green in his plenary address at Lausanne.

*What an incredible statistic! What is the implication?[W]e need to see ourselves as a new kind of missionary. And we must train people in our churches to do the same. We must dream missionary dreams. We must bleed missionary blood. We must pray missionary prayers. (Tom Clegg and Warren Bird, *Lost in America*, see citation in Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, Zondervan, Grand rapids, MI, 2003, 69)*

- **James 1:27**, *Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by **the world**.*
- **James 4:4**, *You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with **the world** is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of **the world** becomes an enemy of God.*
- *It is possible to argue persuasively that many Christians have been seduced by the power of the tools they have acquired. Born-again adults spend an average of seven times more hours each week watching television than they do participating in spiritual pursuits such as Bible reading, prayer, and worship. They spend roughly twice as much money on entertainment as they donate to their church. (George Barna quoted in Luis Palau responds E-zine, June 15, 2000)*
- **I John 2:15**, *Do not love the world or anything in **the world**. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For everything in **the world**-- the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does-- comes not from the Father but from the world*
- Back to the “**Letter of Diognetus**”: *They love all men, and by all men are persecuted..... They are dishonored, and in their very dishonor are glorified; they are defamed, and are vindicated..... They are treated by the Jews as foreigners and enemies, and are hunted down by the Greeks; and all the time those who hate them find it impossible to justify their enmity. (Bakke, 191)*
- Now, somewhere, in any discussion about Christians and culture, someone is going to make a statement that the distinction between the sacred and the secular is artificial or, at least, extremely narrow. This thinking is foreign to the Bible, e.g., **Ezekiel 22:26**,

“Her priests do violence to my law and profane my holy things; they do not distinguish between the holy and the common; they teach that there is no difference between the unclean and the clean; and they shut their eyes to the keeping of my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them.”

- In A.D. 140, an anonymous writer [called the **Letter to Diognetus**] sent a letter to a government official telling him that Christians were not a threat to the city—rather they were the conscience or very soul of the city.

*“They live in their own countries, but only as aliens.... Every foreign land is their fatherland, and yet for them every fatherland is a foreign land. They marry, like everyone else, and they beget children, but they do not cast out their offspring. They share their board with each other, but not their marriage bed. It is true that they are ‘in the flesh,’ but they do not live ‘according to the flesh.’ They busy themselves on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. They obey the established laws, but in their own lives they go far beyond what the laws require.” (Ray Bakke, *A Theology as Big as the City*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 1997, 190)*
- *The 2004 Academy Awards began with these words from Sir Sean Connery....”For more than 100 years the world has been fascinated by the movies. They are more than just an entertainment. They’re the force that binds us together; the common link that touches the humanity of all of us. And that’s why we love to watch the movies. (Quoted in Staublog, Culturewatch, www.dickstaub.com, 3/5/2004)*
- **We do good deeds:** Alan Doswald is executive director of Evangelicals for Social Action/Love INC in Fresno, CA. One day a friend of his who is a prof at a city college in Fresno set up a lunch appointment for him to meet with an atheist professor colleague who was always putting Christians down. *“They’re hypocrites, they don’t care, they don’t make a difference, they don’t do anything.”*

So they sat down at lunch and the prof went off on his hypocrite speech. So Alan said, *“Tell me what other group does more than Christians to help people in need outside their own group.” A silence followed. He couldn’t think of any.*

“Locally, do you know of such a group?” I asked. “Nationally? Internationally?”

He said, “What about Marxists?”

“Are you serious?” I said. Stalin killed millions of his own people.”

“Well, maybe not,” he said.

- He eventually admitted that no other group comes close to doing what Christians do to help others outside their circle. There is no Hindu homeless shelter in Fresno. There is no Buddhist food pantry in Fresno. There is no Muslim clothing ministry for street people in Fresno.* (Alan Doswald, "The Largest Company in Your City," *Christianity Today*, January 2005, 50)
- *In Alexandria, [in the early church] women rounded up destitute babies and orphans and cared for them. Christians in the Egyptian cities knocked on poor peoples' doors and offered to move in to nurse the sick, deliberately exposing themselves to illness,* (Ray Bakke, *The Urban Christian*, InterVarsity Press, Downers grove, IL, 1987, 83)

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