**Lesson 5: Presenting Your Case**

Text: Romans 2:12-29

**Introduction**

Have you ever found yourself scrabbling to prove your innocence or to justify your actions? Every week professional athletes present their case to the referee who blew the whistle on them. A darling little four-year-old may try to explain why he slapped his two-year-old sibling. Professionally and unprofessionally, we are inclined to present our case when we are confronted. At this point in Paul’s letter to the Romans, Paul anticipated resistance from the Jews regarding the reality of their spiritual state. They wrongly assumed that they were exempt from the judgment of God on the basis of their Jewish heritage. However, God does not grant special treatment to any sinner. He is impartial in His judgment. They may have been born into the family of Abraham, but they needed to be born again into the family of God. Paul knew that the Jews not only appealed to their lineage, they also appealed to their possession of the law and the sign of circumcision. Surely they were accepted with God on these two additional accounts! In this lesson, we will explore God’s position regarding these arguments and how sinners continue to justify themselves before God.

1. **The Jewish appeal to having the law was insufficient to justify them before God. (v. 12-24)**
   1. Paul demonstrates in these verses that it is not the possession of the law, but the doing of the law that really matters. Yes, the Gentiles perish without the law, but so do the Jews who have the law. (v. 12) The reason is introduced in the next verse.
   2. The only way a person could be justified by the law is by perfect obedience. (v. 13)
   3. Although the Gentiles do not have the law of Moses, they have the God-given moral sense of right and wrong. (v. 14-15) They obey their parents, remain faithful to their spouse, and other aspects of the law. This does not mean that keep the law perfectly. Neither does it mean that they are not in need of salvation. Their conscience reveals the extent to which they are keeping God’s standard.
   4. Both Jews and Gentiles fall desperately short of God’s standard of righteousness as it will be revealed in the final judgment. (v. 16)
   5. “Paul agreed with the Jewish belief that justification could, in theory, be secured through works. Where Paul disagreed with Judaism was in his beliefs that the power of sin prevents any person, even the Jews who depends on his or her covenant status, from actually achieving justification in that matter.” (Douglas Moo)
   6. In verse 17, Paul returns to directly addressing a Jewish opponent who argued that his title as a “Jew,” reliance upon the law, and his special relationship with God was sufficient to make up for any wrong that he had committed.
   7. If these were not enough to make their case, they could add the following distinctions:
      1. They know God’s will and what aspects of the law matter most to God. (v. 18)
      2. They not only had the law, they were teachers of the law! (v. 19-20)
   8. Paul objected. (v. 21-24)
      1. They may have been teachers of the law, but they had also broken the law themselves. They were not practicing what they were preaching. Religious pride coupled with sinful living brought dishonor to the God they claimed to serve.
      2. Many of the Gentiles recognized that the Jews were not as holy and righteous as their robes made them to be. The Gentiles saw how they really were in the business world, not just how they acted when they were in the temple. In many cases, their adherence to the law was simply a cover-up.
2. **As an additional effort to claim a special relationship with God, the Jews appealed to their circumcision. (v.25-29)**
   1. Circumcision was given as a *sign* to Abraham and his offspring as recipients of the covenant. It was not the *means* by which they were made recipients.
      1. Salvation was never through circumcision. Abraham was made right with God by faith prior to his circumcision. (Gen. 15:6; 17:11)
      2. It was a common belief among Jews of Paul’s day that circumcision prevented every Jew from facing God’s wrath. They figured it was an “automatic pardon.” (Douglas Moo)
   2. Paul said that breaking the law made circumcision ineffective. (v. 25)
   3. He introduced a hypothetical situation. If it were possible for an uncircumcised Gentile to perfectly keep the law, the uncircumcised Gentile would be counted as righteous before God. (v. 26) Contrary to popular belief, the Gentile could in that case judge the Jew! (v. 27)
   4. Outward profession does not equal inward possession of righteousness. (v. 28-29) The person who is truly right with God has been born again. God receives the praise for that person’s salvation. It is a change that has taken place in the heart.
   5. The development of Paul’s case leads to this conclusion: Jews and Gentiles are no different. Both have sinned and both need God’s salvation.
3. **Central Idea: The Jewish appeal to possession of the law and circumcision was unjustified because God demands perfect obedience to the law.**
4. **Application: Appeals to self-righteousness are insufficient because God demands perfect obedience to the law**.
   1. Assess your standing before God. The following appeals will not work: “I’m Baptist.” “I’m a member of this church.” “I’ve taught a Sunday school class for over 25 years.”
   2. Since strict obedience to the law is demanded by God, the only way to be declared righteous is through the One who perfectly kept the law, Jesus Christ.
   3. Understanding this text should cause us to sing songs such as “Nothing But the Blood” with greater appreciation. Notice the words to this great hymn in light of today’s lesson.
   4. It is understandable that in our soul winning efforts we want to give the solution to man’s problem. However, we need to follow the example of Paul in thoroughly explaining the problem. Only then will the need for salvation be evident.

**Conclusion**

Paul’s letter to the Romans is moving to the solution of the problem. He carefully crafted his case that God’s judgment against sin is impartial. Jews and Gentiles must equally give an account to God. Someday you will stand before God. Will you stand in your own righteousness or that which is available through Jesus Christ? Let Him be your advocate (1 John 2:1-2).