

Romans #5 - Set Free Escaping Religion

- It's a great day. I'm glad you're here. It's my 50th birthday today. I know I don't look a day over 70, thank you so much. And some months ago, Grace looked, my wife looked at the calendar, She said, "Hey, your birthday falls "on a day you're supposed to preach "what do you want to do?" I want to preach. I like what I do. So we're gonna be in Romans chapter two today, and I'm gonna preach then we're gonna go in the back, Grace and I will, while you're singing at the end of service we've got brand new Bibles that are age appropriate for all the kids in the church, plus a sucker. 'Cause we believe in Jesus and fun. And then we're gonna come back close the service in prayer. And then I'm gonna go home and eat carne asada. This is a good day for me. So, we find ourselves in Romans chapter two as we're going through this amazing book of the Bible. And God made us in his image and likeness so there is something deep within the human condition that we just want to be good people. We want to be good people and we're trying to figure out how to be good people. To use the language of the Bible, righteous or righteousness or rightness is what we are seeking. And so Paul told us in Romans chapter one, how we can be righteous. Declared, accepted, righteous in the sight of God. He says I'm not ashamed of the gospel, which is the story of Jesus. It is the power of God. God wants to do something powerful in your life for the salvation. Jesus can save you from Satan, sin death, hell, the wrath of God and all of your bad decisions to everyone who believes. The big idea is just believe in Jesus. You want to go to heaven, believe in Jesus. You want your sin forgiven, believe in Jesus. You want to get right with God, believe in Jesus. It all comes down to one simple thing, relationship with Jesus Christ. He says for in it, the righteousness of God, what he's saying is this, we're unrighteous God is righteous. So righteousness, rightness, goodness belongs to God, but it is revealed by God and it is received by faith. That's what he says. The righteous live from faith to faith. So the point is this, we're all unrighteous, God alone is righteous. Jesus comes down, He lives the good life, He lives the right life, He lives the righteous life, He dies to forgive our sins and He traded places with you and me. So He took all of our sin and He gives us all of His righteousness. This is gift righteousness. We didn't deserve it, Jesus did. We didn't do the work, Jesus did. And he says then that there are three great threats to this gift of righteousness. One he dealt with at the end of chapter one. And that is thinking that you just can live in a state of unrighteousness, meaning I'm not gonna change, I am the way I am, my gender, my sex, my identity how I see myself, it's just fine, you can't judge me, God can't judge me, there's nothing in my life that needs to change. So we talked about that with all the pride people. Then in chapter two, he talks about secular religious people. Meaning I'm a good person 'cause I do the right thing or I have a moral course or I'm voting for the right candidate or I'm fighting oppression, I'm using the right hashtag, I'm a social justice warrior, I'm one of those woke folk. And so we dealt with them last week. This week, he's gonna talk about the third enemy of righteousness through Jesus Christ and that is religion. Oh boys! So if you've not been offended yet, it's your time. We're gonna talk about everybody religion. It's the folks that are conservative, the folks that are traditional. The folks who are on the right are the ones who think they're right. Okay? I know we're in Scottsdale. You're like, I liked it when we talked about the people in San Francisco, they're naughty. But we're the good people. We golf, we vote Republican and we

have pools. We are blessed by God. Obviously, we're the good people. What he's talking about is people who grew up in church, are learning the Bible are knowing right and wrong and living basically good lives. But what he's saying is that this is a great enemy of the gospel of Jesus Christ because it's still about what I do, not what He does. If it's about what I earn, not the gift that He gives. It makes me the center and not Him the center. My performance, not His performance the focus. Paul who's writing this was the most religious of all. He says in Philippians 3:6, as to righteousness under the law, blameless. The man writing this have religion and that was his problem. What he needed was a relationship with Jesus Christ. He thought he was making himself righteous through his religion. He didn't know that Jesus would make him righteous through a relationship. And let me tell you this, of the three possible enemies of the health and wellbeing of our church, this one is the most dangerous and lethal.

- [Man] Amen.

- Our biggest problems aren't out there, they're in here. The biggest problems aren't the people who don't know the Bible, it's the people who think they know the Bible and they don't. And if we learn anything from the ministry of Jesus and also the betrayal of Judas, the real problem is always on the inside, not the outside. So he's gonna deal with five religious traps. Number one information not transformation, Romans 2:12-13, for all who have sinned without the law they don't know the Bible, they don't have the Old Testament, will also perish without the law and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law for it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified or declared just right in the sight of God. Number one he says, we all have sinned. Is this true? 'Cause here's what happens. We tend to be way more aware of other people's sin than our own. And we live in a day when it's really popular to confess other people's sin and not our own. And we even have whole protests and movements just telling the world about what other people did. And my belief is if you're gonna be consistent by protesting all the wrongdoing in the world, you should start with yourself. Before you put on some placard, what someone else did, you should write your own sins. And you should protest yourself. I don't tithe, I got a potty mouth, I am sleeping with my girlfriend, I kicked my dog and I cheat on my taxes. So protest yourself, picket yourself. If you wanna loot, loot your own stuff, okay? Start at home, that's what I'm telling you. That we live in a day when everyone does evil but we like to talk about their evil, not our evil. And this begins our religious disposition or attitude. What he goes on to say then is the more that you know, the more responsible you are. When he talks about those who have versus those who do not have the law, he's talking about the first five books of the Old Testament. Pentateuch meaning the book in five parts. It has 613 laws. Some of you grew up, how many of you grew up? You grew up at church, Christian family, Christian school, camp, how many of you that was you? The more you know the more you are responsible for. What that means is just listening to Bible teaching without heeding Bible teaching only increases judgment. It does not in any way benefit you unless you use it. And what he's talking about here is those who simply hear the scriptures and think that they're doing great. The scriptures are not just to be heard, they are to be obeyed. And some people treat the Bible like they treat classes in school. How many of you took classes in school that you have no intention of ever using for anything, right? We call this high school,

and when you get to college, these are usually your electives. You're never going to use that information. The Bible is not just simply for information, but for transformation. It's not just things to learn, it's ways to live. It's very practical. So then the question is if it's not just hearing but doing then what does it mean to be a doer of the word of God? That's the big issue. And what happens with religious people they make a very long list and they think that that is their job description. They don't realize that was Jesus' job description. These are the things that you and I have failed to do. These are the things that He has intentionally done. And as a result, He has fulfilled the law for us. And then with a relationship with Him, He begins to teach and help us to become more like Him. But what's the heart of the law? So in Jesus' day, the religious leaders, they came up to Him, they're like, "Oh my gosh, "there are 613 dos and don'ts in the first five books. "I got to get a goat, "I got to make an altar, "I got Holy smokes. "Jesus can you break this down? "Can you simplify this? "Can give us a tweak?" Is basically what they were asking. He said, "Yeah, I can do that for you." He said here's the summary of what it means to be a doer of the law. Love God with all your heart, emotional life all your mind, mental life, all your soul, spiritual life all your strength, physical life. Love God and then what? Love people. What Jesus was saying is it's about the relationships. It's about the relationships. See love is a, it's a relational word. And what he's saying is that your relationship with God is one sourced in love. That God loves you and God wants you to love Him. Here's what I'm telling you. You're not biblical unless you're relational. And sometimes the most religious people are the least relational people. Sometimes people quote verses but really it feels like they're throwing punches. They're not building the relationship, they're breaking the relationship. And your relationship with God is to inform and instruct you what a healthy relationship looks like. And the reason why some people have broken relationships, difficult marriages, children that don't enjoy them and they seem very lonely is because they have a misperception of their relationship with God. God's far away, therefore I'm distant. God judges me, so I judge you. God punishes me, so I punish you. God is usually pretty angry at me, so I start by being angry with you. And those religious people who have a misperception of God, they will then use and abuse people thinking that they're being godly, wrongly thinking that they're treating people the way God treats people. No, God loves you, and he wants you to love Him and love them. God forgives you, so he wants you to forgive them. God blesses you so he wants you to bless them. God is really patient with you He told us that earlier in Romans, so God wants you to be patient with them. God comes alongside to build you up, not to beat you down and God wants you to come alongside of them to build them up and not beat them down.

- [Man] Amen.

- Here's what I'm saying. You're not biblical unless you're relational. You haven't rightly understood the Bible unless you're a more loving person.

- [Man] Amen.

- And unless the people around you who do life with you, feel more loved by you, you may be reading the scriptures but you're not a doer of the law 'cause doing is about loving and loving is

about relating. So when we founded this church, it was very intentional. I put together the mission statement. We open our Bibles to learn and we open our lives to love. Because the point of the Bible is a relationship with God and people. That's ultimately what we're trying to do. These are the two oars in our boat, these are the two pedals on our bike, this is the mission statement for every department in the church. And I want you to know that it's not enough just to listen to Bible teaching. You need to be not only hearers of the word but doers. 'Cause it's not just for information so you can argue with people it's about transformation so you can love them. Number two, it's very quiet. Just so you know, this is a participatory event. I am 50, this is the third one, I am tired and I could use some help, okay? I hear at 50 the check engine light comes on, you start leaking oil and you can't read 'cause you go blind. So any way you would like to encourage I would appreciate that. All right, religious trap number two, covert not overt. Romans 2:14-16, for when Gentiles that's us. The non-Jewish folks who do not have the law, didn't grow up reading the Bible, didn't grow up going to church, didn't grow up in Christian school or youth group, by nature do what the law requires. They are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse, or even excuse them on that day when according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus. What he's talking about here is this. God is a good God, He's a moral God, He's a right and wrong God. And there are two ways that he communicates his goodness and his righteousness and his morality to us. First, everyone has within them, He's gonna use this word, a conscience. Now a conscience can't save you but it can help you. A conscience can't get you to heaven, but it can get you out of trouble. Everyone has a conscience. Now here's what's really weird in our day, there are people who will deny that there is a God, they will deny that God gives universal laws and then when they feel something is violated their conscience appeals to a law they deny. "That was wrong, "where is justice?" It's the conscience crying out. It's the conscience crying out. God gave you a conscience. You're gonna need it so don't break it. In addition to the conscience, God gave us the scriptures. And what he's saying is that God will judge. You and I are not gonna judge each other at the end of time. Now in the meantime, we judge one another all the time. But at the end of time, only judgment comes through Christ Jesus. Jesus said this in John 5. He says the Father judges no one he's entrusted all judgment to the Son. We set up our little social media thrones and we just render verdicts and judgments about the universe and everyone in it. At the end of time, we will not be the ones judging, we will be the ones getting judged. And what he's saying is the more you know the more you're responsible for. Everybody has a conscience and they'll be judged accordingly. For those of us who have the word of God will be judged additionally. That's exactly what he was saying. Now let me say this as well. Your conscience is really a gift to you. This is why you don't wanna violate or break your conscience because you'll need it. How many of you before you even knew Jesus before you knew the Bible, your conscience kept you out of some harm, some self destructive decisions, okay? I'll never forget. And it's a grace of God to us all that he gave us a conscience. I remember my folks are here, they flew for my birthday, I grew up being told right and wrong and don't do this and do do that and then I went to college Now your parents are gone and there's no witnesses. And you get to decide who you're gonna be and what you're gonna do. So I joined a fraternity which is the Greek word for naughty young men. And I joined a fraternity and it was the first

weekend. And I didn't know the Lord but I said "Okay, what are we doing?" They said, "We're having our first party." I was like awesome, tell me what we're gonna do. They said, "Well, the whole basement's gonna be dark "and we're gonna put black lights on "and there's gonna be tons of beer and a DJ "and a whole bunch of girls "from a sorority are coming over "and we're all gonna go down in the basement "'cause it's closer to hell. "And we're gonna do some naughty things there." I was like, okay so let me get this. So we're gonna be in the dark with beer and a DJ and girls. They said yes. If you're a teenage boy you're like, these are a few of my favorite things. So I'm going to my first fraternity party. And I kid you not, I could see the black lights, there's all the sorority girls, I can hear the bass, I could smell the beer. And I'm right on the precipice of entering into the party, and literally my conscience stopped me. And I believe it was the Holy Spirit working through my conscience. And I realized if I cross into that party, I am entering into a new life. So the guys looked at me like, come on in man. I was like, nah I'm not gonna go. I literally walked away from the party. So I went to the library where I was the only person born in this country. It was like late Friday night, all the international students were there. And they're all looking at me like, I'm gonna get an American friend. I'm like, this is not the end zone I've been driving throughout my whole life. But in that moment, your conscience can't get you to heaven but it can keep you from some trouble. How many of you, your conscience has been a bit of a help to you, okay. And so what he's saying is God gives us our conscience, we know that certain things are right and wrong. He also gives us the scriptures, additional things that are right and wrong. But here's the problem with religion. Religion is very covert it's not very overt. Because the religious person is always judging everyone else very overtly and then sinning very covertly. So I deal with your sins very publicly but my stuff I deal with very privately. How many of you, you grew up in a religious home where your parents told you what to do and then later on you realized that's not what they do. How many of you, your religious friend was like, Oh now you know, when you're dating don't cross any lines, you know. You're like, you're cheating on mom. Right, what? You're overt with your demands for me, you're covert with your behavior for you. And what he talks about judging the secrets here, what he's saying here is that religious people are not better than other people they're just better at hiding. Okay? Secret things. If we learn anything from the disciples of Jesus, particularly Judas is that the most religious people are the most covert people. You don't know what they're doing. They're very sneaky. So Judas was a guy you look at his life He's one of Jesus' disciples, seems fine. Doesn't draw attention to himself, he's not like Peter create lots of drama and conflict. Not like that. He's just sort of off to the side, stage left no trouble. And then he steps forward. And with him he's got religious leaders and political leaders in an unholy alliance. He's got an arrest warrant for Jesus. He's got guys with swords and clubs and torches. He's got a kangaroo court set up and he's got an execution date scheduled for Jesus. And he's been stealing money for a month to fund the whole thing for three years. It's not that he was a good man, it's that he was a sneaky man. And he got exposed or revealed at the end. This is how many people will live their life. That you will think they're good people, they're fine people, they're moral people, then on the last day when Jesus Christ brings forth all of their secrets, we'll all be shocked. So the point is this, don't worry about judging them let Jesus judge them you worry about judging you 'cause Jesus is gonna judge you. And what happens in a religious, judgmental, self-righteous, legalistic culture it encourages people to be sneaky, to be covert. Because if you step forward and say,

I'm struggling with, this hammered. They're going to pound you like a nail. If you are a person who is very judgmental, people especially let's say even your own kids they're gonna hide what they're doing from you. If you have an environment of grace that is overt and not covert it encourages people to come clean before they get caught. I'm struggling with this, this is a problem for me, I need some help. Because in a religious environment there is no redemption, there is only punishment. So number one first problem, information not transformation. Problem number two, covert not overt. Problem number three, preaching not practicing. Romans 2:17-23. But if you call yourself a Jew, a believer, this is a person who believes in God. it's all the God talk. I believe in God, I follow God, I accepted God and rely on the law and boast in God. And know his will and approve what is excellent because you are instructed from the law. And if you are sure I know exactly what I'm talking about, these people are totally confident. You're sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind., My eyes are open, follow me I know exactly what to do. And by the way I'll tell you, I lie to those who are in darkness, other people don't see it I do, I know what's going on. An instructor to the foolish. Grab your pen take a note, I'll tell you what to do. A teacher of children, give me the next generation. Having in the law, the embodiment of knowledge and truth, you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? I'm a teacher so that's scary to me. While you preach against stealing do you steal? You say don't commit adultery, are you faithful to your spouse? You hate idols, do you rob temples? Are you taking things that belong to God? You boast in the law, dishonor God by breaking the law. What he's talking about here is that a religious spirit is about preaching things that you don't practice. Right? And it's amazing to me because it happens all the time. And I'll tell you as a teacher this is sort of a concerning verse to check my own soul if I'm totally honest with you. 'Cause he said your conscience, you'll be judged by that. The Bible you'll be judged by that. And if you're teaching, you'll be judged by that. That means there are three levels of judgment before God. What your conscience said, what the scripture said and what you said, scary. So Jesus' brother James says not many should presume to be teachers 'cause you'll be judged more strictly. There's a judgment for teachers. That being said, what he talks about is hypocrisy, hypocrisy. These are people who will say you should not steal, but they don't give generously. And we even live in a day now where it's really weird because even politically we will command things of people that we won't do which is hypocrisy one is financial. Like right now, what do we call it when somebody has money and the government takes it and then gives it to everybody else. We call it?

- [Congregants] Socialism.

- Socialism, we call it redistribution, the Bible calls it stealing. And what that is is what we need to be generous. Well then be generous. But don't vote somebody to steal my money and give it away, that's not generosity that's Judas Iscariot. You're taking money that don't belong to you and giving it away.

- [Man] Great.

- And I see this even with socialistic leaders in the sense of moral course. They're like, you know

what, we need to redistribute the wealth. Well start with your own. You know I'd like to see one socialist running for office, because they need to report their charitable giving and pretty much they're all 0 to 3%. We need to be generous, no you need to be generous.

- [Man] Amen.

- You peel into your pocket before you come looking for my wallet. This is what we do. We demand things of people that we don't demand of ourselves and we judge people for things that we are not doing. And we all have this religious spirit within us, right? Because we're the good people, they're the bad people. If they just did what we said the world would be a better place. No, if we did what we were supposed to do then we would be accountable in the sight of God and they need to do what they're supposed to do and they are accountable in the sight of God. And what he's saying is religious people when they show up, first thing I wanna be a leader. I know what to do. And then they wanna be a teacher, who do I get? God's called me to teach. Really? He didn't call me, I didn't get that call. My phone's been on all day. I didn't hear that. These are people that walk into the door or walk into your life and the first thing they do is start bossing you around and telling you what to do. You ever met these people? Some of you are married to them. We're about to heal your marriage. And these people are very confident and they're very self assured and they could be very pushy and they could be very demanding but here's how they work, law for you grace for me. Here's what you need to do and you need to do and you need to do, and here's where you messed up and this was your shortcoming and this was your failure and you could have done that better. Okay, let's talk about your life. Oh brother, Bible says don't judge I found a verse. That's not very loving. This is just how I am. I took a personality test they said I'm M-E-A-N that's just how God named me that's my personality. See it's always law for you grace for me. Well it's law for everybody or grace for everybody but it can't be law for them and grace for you. And what happens with religious people, this is what he's essentially talking about. They use the Bible as binoculars, not a mirror. A friend of mine says this, pastor friend. Hey let's say these are binoculars. What do I see? I see far away from me. Can I see myself? I can't see myself. I'm blind to myself. But I could see you very clearly. That guy didn't floss That guy needs a shower. That guy, right has dandruff. I could see that, but I can't see my own stuff. The Bible is not to be first and foremost binoculars for you it's to be a mirror for me. Oh boy! Oh gosh! I would judge you but I got so much to deal with I am busy. How many of you have read the Bible and you're like, I didn't know I was that bad. I had this some years ago, new Christians came up to me I gave them the first Bible, they came back three weeks later, "Pastor Mark I'm reading the Bible and it's not working, "it's not working." I said, "What do you mean it's not working?" They said, "The more I read it the worse I feel." Bazinga you nailed it. The point is you need Jesus. This is not about all the awesome things you've done. It's about all the awful things you've done and all the awesome things Jesus has done. That's what it's about.

- [Congregants] Amen.

- So how many of you, when you read the Bible your first instinct is, Oh this is a really good

verse for them, right? Or this is a good sermon I'm gonna send it to them. It's for you friend. It's for you. Now ultimately what this leads to, law for you grace for me, right? Binoculars for you, mirror for me. It leads to something and this is the driving concept between Paul's section hypocrisy. And the Bible uses the word hypocrite. It's an ancient Greek word that was taken from drama and theater. So the way it would work in ancient Greek drama and theater one actor or actress would play multiple roles during the course of a play. So they'd go off stage, they grab a mask they would come on and they would play their role. And then they would exit the stage. They'd get their next mask and they would put it on and they would come on the stage and they would play their role. And through the course of the play one actor or actress would play multiple characters and roles, but they never revealed who they truly were. That's a hypocrite. Oh my Christian friends are watching praise the Lord. I'm with my non-Christian friends, pour me a drink. These are my going to church clothes and these are my going to club clothes and they're not the same size as my going to church clothes. Right? My underwear became my outerwear this is what happens. And what that is that is hypocrisy because we ought to be the same people all the time. DL Moody used to say, character is what you are in the dark. If you're a different person when people are looking than when they're not. If you're a different person with family than you are with Christian friends. If you're a different person when others are pressuring you than when others are praising you that's hypocrisy. And let's just be honest. We all have it, right? We all have varying degrees of hypocrisy. And so we use the word of God to examine ourselves and to find it. Number four, this is really the heart of the issue. Religious trap number four, rules not relationships. For it is written, he quotes the Old Testament Romans 2:24 does the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles that's the non-Christians, the unbelievers because of you. What he's talking about initially is this religious, legalistic, rule-based, punitive kind of lifestyle. It really hurts relationships in the church. It really hurts relationships in families. And it really repulses unbelievers. The people who need the Bible the most sometimes are the ones who bump into the religious people, who quote verses but are the least helpful. How many of you before you became a Christian, you hated Christians because of that Christian you knew. Lots of judgment, lots of rules, lots of punishment, lots of condemnation. Couple of things I will say, dealing with non-Christian family, friends, coworkers, neighbors. Number one, I always like to say connect before you correct. If you're gonna talk to somebody about things in their life, you need to make sure that they know that you love them and you're seeking their best interest, right? That ultimately if you don't know them and you don't love them, they do not trust that you have their best interest at heart, they may just think that you're trying to control them or punish them. Which causes them to hate everything that you are saying and the God that they think that you are speaking for. And what I would say is winning arguments is fine but winning people is more important.

- [Man] Amen.

- Hey there's no problem with winning an argument but you wanna win people to Jesus Christ. And to win people to Jesus Christ, you need to make a relationship. If all you wanna do is win an argument, all you need to do is make a point. Let me say this. There are plenty of people in this world making a point very few people making a relationship, okay? And if you want to make

a point, you can win an argument. If you wanna win a person, you need to make a relationship. And what happens as well, when you're dealing with religious people they demand progress and they don't encourage, excuse me, they demand perfection and they don't encourage progress, okay? Because true or false God's standard is perfection, okay? It's not true question is God's standard perfection. It is, Jesus says be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect, okay. You can hear that in one of two ways. That's what I need to do or I can't do that. If you come to the decision, I'm not perfect, I've not been perfect, my wife says I'll never be perfect. I don't think I'm gonna make it. You know what you need, you need Jesus to be perfect in your place. And what you need is the perfect Jesus to come and meet you wherever you are. So let's say perfection is there and you're here. Religious people just keep saying, you're not there, you're not there, you're not there, you did this but you didn't do that, you did this but you didn't do it right, you did this but you didn't finish it. It's always discouraging. Jesus comes along and what he says is I'm perfect and now I am going to walk with you in a relationship and we're going to make progress and I have an eternal plan that I'm gonna make you perfect. Is that Jesus? Highly relational. This is why Jesus came down to the earth and just didn't send commands to the earth. He's real relational. And what Jesus does along the way, he celebrates with us the progress. This is what the Bible uses all the New Testament for your walk with God. You took a step, good job. How many of you when you were a kid took their first step, you were cheering. Well God's a father. When you take the first step he's cheering. You watch your kids little guys, and they're taking their steps. You know what, that's exciting and we celebrate that. God's a father who celebrates his children taking the next step. He celebrates the progress. I talked to somebody recently, they said man I'm so frustrated. I've been inviting this person that I know and love and they finally came to church and they asked for a Bible and they started reading it. But it's so frustrating 'cause they're not saved yet. Wait a minute, celebrate the progress. They came to church. That's a big step. They listened to me. That's like seven steps. Okay? They came back. Now we're into miracle territory. I mean that's crazy. They asked for a Bible and they're reading it. You know what? The walk has begun. And if they're walking with Jesus, here's what I know, He's gonna keep them going. Until ultimately they cross the line of faith and then they die. And then they cross the line of perfection. And so this whole disposition is about the rules, not about the relationship. And here's what I wanna say. I wanna say that rules without relationship results in rebellion. And I wanna make this into a parenting point. 'Cause here's what I know. We get most legalistic, rule-based and judgmental about our kids. You tend to make the most rules to try and protect the people that you love the most. We love our kids the most, Amen. Okay, one of you said yes, I'm praying for the rest of your kids. We love our kids, right? They're like I mean sometimes a couple of them. Yes, so we love our kids, right?

- [Congregants] Yay.

- Okay, so if you have rules for your kids and not relationship with your kids you will encourage rebellion from your kids. I'll give you an analogy. Some years ago, we were young, broke, planning our first church, God graciously opened up an opportunity for us to obtain a rental home that we could purchase that needed a lot of work. But it was on a major busy street, tons of traffic cars flying by. So when we first got the property, first thing I did before we let the kids

outside I had a fence built all around the yard. But I do that because I love the children or I wanna restrict their freedom. I love them. What did it feel like to them? That's very restrictive. No I'm very loving. The fence is not to restrict you it is to protect you. The fence is to keep you out of harm's way. But the goal is to live in the yard, to play wiffle ball over here, swing set over there, sandbox, set it all up. Hey kids play outside. My boys love playing wiffle ball but if you hit a ball over the fence what? Don't go get it because it's in traffic, okay. So ultimately the way I see God is he's a father. So everything God has for us is parental. God's word has laws in it. Each of those laws is like a picket in a fence. The whole point is to create a boundary so that the children of God can have a ton of fun and not enter into harm's way. Okay, that's the point. The point is not to focus on the fence. The focus is to play in the yard. Okay, this is where religious people are always like, let's talk about the fence. It's like, no let's talk about wiffle ball. Let's talk about the swing set. Let's talk about the sandbox. Let's talk about the slip and slide. The focus is not the fence. The fence exists to create the yard in which we play and have fun.

- [Man] Amen.

- Okay, that's how I see God. Now what religious people do, they think that God's fence is a little too broad, okay? So okay, there's a fence here and there's danger over here. So then dad comes along and says, well you know what? Let's move that fence in, few more rules, few more laws, few more planks, because if the kids can get five more feet away from danger, then they're even more safe. And then mom comes along and says, well actually I think we should go in another 15 or 20 feet. Next thing you know the kids are in the yard and they're like, men the fence is what? It's closing in. all of a sudden it's not a yard it's a prison. You can't go anywhere. You can't do anything. And the parents are thinking this'll keep them safe. No, actually it's going to cause them to hop the fence and be in danger. How many of you were that kid? Your parents gave a lot of rules. They didn't give much relationship. And you had a big rebellion. That's what happens. Because if the kids can't enjoy their life and they're stuck in what feels like a prison of rules and laws and judgments and obligations and duties and expectations, eventually they jump the fence right around age 18. That's why some people will say, "I don't know what happened. "We had such good kids." No, you had kids in prison and then they got out. Once they got out of prison, they decided every day was going to be Mardi Gras because they wanted to rebel. How many of you that was you? Is it none of you? None of you were the naughty kids You're at the 11 o'clock. You couldn't even get up for the night. I know who you are I know who you are. Okay. Point number five. Religious trap number five. Outward not inward. Physical not spiritual. Visible not invisible. Romans 5:25-29, for circumcision. So, I've saved the best for last. I know all of you today wake up you're like, I hope we're talking about circumcision. Huh, I've been going to that church and we haven't talked about it and I'm wondering when we're gonna finally get to this pressing issue Today's your lucky day, prayer answered, okay. For circumcision is of value if you obey the law. What he's saying is that external signs make sense if you have the internal rail. I love Grace, we're married so I wear a ring. But if I'm not married and I don't have a wife, the ring doesn't make any sense 'Cause it doesn't point to anything real. But if you break the law your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. So if a man who is uncircumcised, keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision. Then he

who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. For no one is a Jew, a believer, has a relationship with God who is merely one outwardly nor is circumcision outward there's our word and physical but a Jew is one inwardly versus outward and circumcision is a matter of the heart by the spirit not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God. Here's what he's saying. We tend to think of physical things not spiritual things, we tend to think of visible things not invisible things. We tend to think of things that are outward not inward. And what we do we do those things so that everybody else will see it. And then they will praise us You fasted for 40 days, good job. You went on a mission trip, good job. You tithed, here's a big check. Take a photo, put it on social media. Show everybody how humble you are, yay. Outward. And what he's saying is outward isn't bad, but inward is really what matters to God. And oftentimes we are trying to change the outward and God's trying to change the inward. And we're living for the praise of others. So what he's talking about here. What he's talking about is that ultimately every generation has some false conception of junior varsity and varsity Christians. Now to be junior varsity, you believe in Jesus. To be varsity you do something in addition to believing in Jesus to go varsity. And their day it was what? We just read it. Circumcision, how many of you guys you're like, yeah that's varsity right there, right? You're like, okay I wanna go to heaven. Well you need to get circumcised. Okay what if I don't? You're going to go to hell, what do you want? What's your choice? I don't know, I could go either way. I mean, so for them it was this big, public, external, physical, outward varsity move. It was a big debate between the Jewish people and the Gentile people. The Jews were circumcised and they were the first Christians and then us Gentiles joined the team and the Jewish believers started saying, here's how you go varsity. And then we judge each other. Oh you didn't do it. Or we praise each other. You did it. Now when we hear of circumcision, it sounds rather silly to us. Here's what I'm telling you. We have our own varsity moves that sound good to us and silly to them. So here's what we're gonna do. I've done a lot of talking. This is now where we have you participate in this dialogue and we're going to make fun of religious people. Out of love, because religious people take themselves too seriously. And we're gonna minister to them by making fun of them. Hey, so what would be some of the things today that you have been told if you do this you're varsity for Jesus?

- [Woman] Speaking in tongues.

- Speaking... I speak in tongues how about you? Are you varsity? Are you varsity? Hey, is it okay to speak in tongues?

- [Congregants] Yes.

- Yes, but if you don't love Jesus it doesn't matter. Okay, what else?

- [Man] Baptized.

- Have you been baptized? And then there's a lot of fine print. We baptize as a baby or an adult? We baptize by immersion or sprinkling. Did your pastor have a squirt gun? I didn't count.

Were you one of those lazy people that got baptized in a hot tub? That does not count? Were you baptized by a pastor or just some random believer? Were you baptized in the name of Jesus or the Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Right? You're like, look I don't know man. I got wet. And I said yay Jesus Right, like I... 'Cause it's not just that you did it, you did it the right way which is our way and their way is the wrong way. So even when they do it, they don't do it right so they're wrong. This is how religion gets going. Alright, let's do this again, I'm having fun. Happy birthday to me. What else would be examples? Have you, okay first of all, somebody said Bible. What translation? First of all, first of all, do you have a Bible? You do, what translation? What translation?

- [Woman] King James.

- King James, I talked to Garrison. He's like, I only read the King James. I was like, okay whatever why? He's like well I did research and the other are satanic versions. Research? Did you watch a YouTube video from a conspiracy theorist? Cause if that's research, then when I put a pop tart in a toaster that makes me a chef. That's what that is. Okay, so I preach people come in all the time. They're like what translation of the Bible does your pastor use? English Standard Version, okay. And every once in a while, what I will do is I'll quote other translations to find the religious people. They're like gophers. They come up out of their home. Did he quote the New International Version? I think it's becoming a cult. Did he quote the Message, that's not even a translation that's paraphrase. I keep waiting for the message only people. I keep waiting for those people. Yeah, we're message. Everything else is a satanic version. Not only do you have a Bible, do you have the right translation of the Bible? Furthermore, do you have a real Bible or a fake Bible on your phone? You're like I got a Bible on my phone. That's not a Bible. That's a fake Bible on your phone next to your naughty social media. You've got Jesus and Facebook together. You need to get rid of your phone and get yourself a good old school dead tree cow gave its life Bible. And then there's the big Bible and the little Bible people. Every once in a while they'll send me an email. They're like your Bible seems a little little, like really? They judge the size of the Bible. It's not like, well I got my Bible is as big as me. There you go, varsity. Right? What other things do we use? What's that?

- [Man] Denomination.

- What denomination are you in? All the people that are in denominations are like, Oh I'm never coming back, this is not working. Are you in this denomination or that denomination? 'Cause these are the good guys and those are the bad guys. Here's what I'll tell you. There's good guys and bad guys in all the denominations. I always tell you that. So if you go to leaders, like what denomination? You're like we're not, we're interdenominational, nondenominational, post-denominational, gladly-ish denominational. There we are. That's clearly our team. They're like, we're on team Jesus. Like where are you? Are you Presbyterian? Little bit Baptist? Nah. How about Pentecostal? Whoop whoop. Okay, are you not... Here's we like Jesus, we believe the Bible. Everybody who likes Jesus believes the Bible is on team Jesus, that's our team. Like what team within the league? No, it's just one big team. And people come in and they're like,

what do you think about this denomination? I think you should not judge them.

- [Congregants] Amen.

- Okay you know, I think you should judge you and while we're at it, I'll help you. Okay, what else do we use?

- [Congregants] Homeschool.

- What's that?

- [Congregants] Homeschool.

- All right, there's a four letter word named home, homeschool. Okay, here we go. What happens then is we make lots of rules about how we educate our children. And we judge everyone else. You wanna see a full blown octagon war to the death between two gladiators? In this corner, we have homeschool mom. She has a Latin trivium curriculum. She quotes dead people, she churns butter, she does art projects, she has a bun in her hair and she takes no guff. In this corner, we have homeschool mom. She works full time. She drinks margaritas. She needs a day off. They are going to talk about schooling the children, ding ding. And it's a fight to the death. None of the moms think that's funny it's hilarious. The Bible has... Here's the big idea. The Bible has principles and methods. Here's a little secret. There is a difference between God's principles and our methods. Is it okay if we have our methods? Yeah, but what we can't pretend is that our methods are God's principles. So the Bible says train up a child in the way they should go. That could be homeschool, private school public school, Christian school, charter school. The parents filled with the spirit need to decide. And different parents will make different decisions. And our job is not to judge them but to pray for them and to encourage them to obey God and train up their child. Which I would say whatever school choice you make you still need a homeschool. Your kids should learn something at your house.

- [Congregants] Amen.

- Okay? And what we do is we take principles and methods and we put them together. The Bible says to worship God, doesn't say how long we worship. Doesn't say what songs we choose, what musical style we prefer. It has a principle we get to choose the methods, okay? And the problem is that religious people in an effort to control, to win arguments and to be in charge, they take their methods and then they quote a Bible verse to pretend that they are speaking for God, true? Religious people put a verse on everything. And what they want you to think is what I'm telling you to do is what God tells you to do. Therefore, if you don't do what I'm telling you to do you're disobeying God. There was even a crummy book written years ago called "Growing Kids God's Way" Is a crummy parenting book. It's about how to legalistically control your kids which works when they're six months old and fails when they're 16 years old. And ultimately the parents who got a hold of that, they took the principles of the Bible, they took a set of methods

and then they would judge you whether or not you were growing kids God's way which is what, our way 'cause our way is God's way, that's a scary thought. Because if it's not this book we gotta be very careful that we're not using this book and then hijacking it for our book. That'd be very careful with these things. I'll give you an example. I went to a family's house some years ago. You know a young pastor went to visit walk in the door, apartment complex, family with kids. The mom comes over. She says, I need you to take your shoes off. Okay, I gotta take my shoes off. Little girl comes up she says, "Yeah 'cause the Bible says so." Wait a minute, wait a minute. Okay, do I mind taking my shoes off? No, that's your rule, that's your house rule that's fine. I got no problem with that. The little girl comes up though and she says, you gotta take your shoes off 'cause the Bible says it. I was like, wait a minute. Where is that? Is that in first and second sneakers? Like where is that? Where's that? I said what do you mean sweetheart? She said, "Well my mom said in the Bible "that when people were with God they took their shoes off "and so we have to obey the Bible, "take our shoes off." Wait a minute little girl. Does the Bible say you have to take your shoes off when you go into an apartment? No. Okay. I said wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a minute. I said, mom did you tell her that the Bible commands her to take her shoes off? She said, "Well I wanted to take her shoes off." That's an abuse of the Bible. Okay, What you need to tell her is the Bible says to honor and obey your mother and father when your mom wants to take your shoes off, that's okay. That's a better verse that allows you to be the parent. But to pretend that what you're telling them is God's word, what it'll do, it'll work to control them for a little while, but when they get bigger and they realize that you've just used and abused the Bible they're gonna reject you and the Bible. So I asked them, I said where does it say that in the Bible? She's like, well you know, in the Old Testament, when people would go into God's presence, they take their shoes off. That has nothing to do with your apartment. That was about the presence of God. So like if we were at the temple and I walked, so I just, I learned toward this, I said, look that was about walking into God's presence in the temple. I said, here's what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna go in the living room. If I see a cherub angel, I see kind of glory of God and something looks like it was stolen from raiders of the lost Ark, I'm gonna take my shoes off. Otherwise we're just walking into your apartment, okay? Again we gotta be very careful that we don't take God's principles, our methods put them together because what we're doing then we're using and abusing God's word. And eventually we're cultivating rebellion against God's word and hatred for those who quote it. There are people that almost end up with PTSD when they hear a Bible verse because they've been abused by the Bible so much. Now let me say this. We tend to get most legalistic, rule-based, controlling in an effort to what we think is lovingly protect the people we care about the most, right? You experienced some pain, some hurt some trauma, some loss. You don't want that to happen. So you think, well somebody needs to be in control. And rather than God you nominate yourself. And there needs to be some rules and rather than God you make your own. And there needs to be someone who is in authority and rather than God you nominate yourself. And the motive is I love them and I'm trying to protect them. But ultimately then you become the one who harms them. This happens with people we love the most like a church. People that have been through church hurt. And oftentimes the people who hurt you in church, they're religious people. They have some own trauma or abuse or pain in their past and they've not healed from it and so then they treat you in a way that is unhealthy. And what can even happen in a church is that over

time hurt people that are fearful and not healed up they just keep adding more rules until it literally turns it into a prison. I talked to a pastor, he said show me your policies I'll show you your pains. Something bad happened in the church. Let's make a policy, a rule of law so it never happens again. Well, the more pain the more policies, the more years, the bigger the manual. The secular version of this is called an HOA. How many of you have been in a homeowner's association? And at first it starts off with a few things you can agree to. You cannot turn your house into a meth lab. That's a good idea. I don't wanna be in "Breaking Bad." I don't want those neighbors. You cannot park a broken down RV in your front yard and protect it with pitbulls, check I'm in. Right, you cannot paint your house purple, you're like, I don't wanna live next to Barney's family, I agree with that. And then what happens is things happen and the new people join the HOA board and for everything that happened, they make a new rule and by the end, you hate living there. Because if you breathe or park your car or pretend like you're going to do anything, then the Pharisees come over with a clipboard and fine you. And the same can happen in a church. So let's talk about what you care about the most, your family. The most intense religious legalisms come in regards to our family and our children, right? And here's the way it works. Trauma, pain, hurt, grief, regret. I don't want the people I love to experience this. Therefore, I am gonna create a very small, controlled, rule-based, legalistic, religious environment so that they are not in harm's way. And the truth is you are the one who harms them. When a child is six months old can you hurt them by squeezing too tight? The principle is also true when they're 16. Ultimately this leads to inner vows, pain happened, I'm gonna make some inner vows to me, not to God. And then I wanna make some outer rules to protect you. But ultimately I'm the one who harms you. This is why the most religious households tend to produce the most rebellious kids, okay? Because it's hard to rebel against a loving relationship. It's very easy to rebel against some real legalistic rules. That's why at our church I say we don't do membership we do relationship. People come in they're like, where do I need to sign? We don't have a contract for you. You know what? I got five kids and zero contracts. If you wanna have a family you better have some relationships. And if you wanna ruin those relationships, start getting the lawyers involved. Okay? I don't have a contract for my kids. We're all gonna get together for dinner tonight not because they signed a contract but because we have a relationship. I believe people do more for love than they will for fear or punishment. I believe that a loving environment brings out the best in people and a religious environment brings out the worst in people. So I was watching a show. I'll give you an example. It was during the lockdown. We weren't allowed to leave home, which was awesome. I miss those days, those were so great. So we're flipping through Netflix, angry at the neighbors 'cause they're using all the bandwidth for the internet. You guys know what it was like, it was awesome. And there was this documentary series on this family that lived in the city, had a bunch of kids, they were Christian and they moved far outside of the city, they bought huge acreage, they have no neighbors, can't see anything. They have no internet, they have no television, they have no cell phone, they are schooled at home, church at home, high control. They're actually a sweet family. They're nice people. They seem to love Jesus, lots of rules, lots of rules. And so the mom and dad decided they were gonna do an overnight to go celebrate their anniversary. They pull all the kids together. Many of them are now older. What do you think they gave them? A list of rules. Can't do this, can't do this. can't do this, can't do this. can't do this, can't do this. can't do this. Here's

what the kids do. They're all covert not overt. Yes mom and dad. Their mom and dad get in the car, hit the end of the driveway. Here's the kids. Woo, alright. Get the list. All right, we can't leave the property, everybody let's go. Says we can't wear makeup ladies, let's get some makeup on. It says we can't wear short skirts, let's get our old skirts and cut them. Right? So now everybody's in rebellion. They're gonna go through the list as quickly as possible. They all got in the car and they drove away as fast as possible. And they went bowling 'Cause that was one of the things on the list. And when they were bowling, they drank pop which was another thing on the list. And they met friends there without parental supervision. Just look at this demonic trinity. Bowling people and pop. They're all gonna be pregnant. We can just know it. Even the boys, this is inevitable And I was watching it with the kids and my kids were like, what? 'Cause we have three rules. Be safe, have fun and love each other. Be safe 'cause boys are always trying to kill themselves. Little boys are suicidal. They just are. Be safe. 'Cause if you have a ladder and a knife, that's the first two things the boys gonna wanna play with. A knife, I'm going up the... No don't, okay. Be safe, have fun 'cause I believe the point of the yard is to play in the yard and love each other so we're all having a good time. So one of my kids looked at me, they're like, dad why do they have so many rules? I said I don't know. Probably some hurt some pain. The parents come back. They interview the mom and she said I grew up in a very bad home, very abusive a lot of pain, horrible things happened to me as a child. And I really love my kids and I don't want those things to happen to them. And she said when the kids were little we were home, and one of the little kids was behind the car and I didn't see them and I was backing out of the driveway and I ran over and killed our own child. Okay, now I have a lot of compassion for this woman. She's been through just tremendous pain and deep trauma, but she's not healed up. And until she's healed up, she's going to be very religious and then her kids are gonna be what? Very rebellious. And what she needs is a relationship with the Holy Spirit to heal her up. And then she needs to teach her kids how to have a relationship with the Holy Spirit so that He can lead and guide them. Some of you're like, but I need, somebody needs to control my kids, His name is the Holy Spirit. But somebody needs to teach my kids, His name is the Holy Spirit. Well somebody needs to convict my kids, His name is the Holy Spirit and you're a child of God you need Him too. So what Paul says that it's a matter of the spirit by the heart. The Holy Spirit wants to give you a new heart and the Holy spirit wants to lead you and guide you and instruct you and protect you and direct you. And when you mess up He's gonna forgive you. And what the Holy spirit does, He changes you at the level of being in desire. And He gives you new desires. I met the Lord at age 19 and I had a love for Jesus. It was supernatural. I had a love for the Bible. I liked the Bible. I've studied it every day since I met Jesus, literally every day. And it's not 'cause I have to it's 'cause I want to. It's not a duty, it's a delight. It's not a work, it's a grace. It's not a have to, it's a get to. And I've been faithful to my wife and it's not because I've white knuckled obedience, it's because I like her. And I like Jesus and hanging out with her and Jesus that's my favorite thing. And what I'm telling you is this, that the Holy spirit wants to heal your hearts. He wants to lift your burdens. He wants to forgive your past. He wants to remove your anxiety. He wants you to trust him for yourself and the people you love the most. And the most powerful thing you can do for yourself is have a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit. And the most powerful thing you could teach your kids is how to have a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit. Some people have asked, how did you raise those kids? I

literally say we didn't, we watched the Holy Spirit raise them. And I was praying for you yesterday. And I said, Holy Spirit is there anything you want me to tell your people? 'Cause you're God's people. And he spoke to me. He said tell them that I love them and I want to help them. So I give that as a word to you. The Holy Spirit loves you. He's not there to judge or destroy or condemn or harm. He loves you and he's there to help you. And some of you most religious people, you're the most broken people, you're the most traumatized people, you're the most hurting people. And you need the Holy Spirit immediately. And we're gonna give you an opportunity to invite His presence and worship. And I'm gonna go give Bibles to your kids and I'm gonna give suckers to your kids too. And if you're a parent that has a rule against that, gotcha. So I'm gonna bring Grace up. I'm gonna have my best friend close our time in prayer, and then we'll spend some time in God's presence. And honey I love you. I wanna thank you for giving me my first Bible and thank you that on my 50th birthday after Jesus, you're the greatest gift I've ever had.

- Thank you. Dear Lord, such an incredible word from you. Just reminding us that we yearn the Holy Spirit and that you specifically sent the Holy Spirit to minister to us and through us. So Lord I pray that if there's things that we're convicted by this morning, that you would really help us heal from our past and pursue your Holy Spirit's healing and guidance and comfort and He is the helper. So Lord help us go to the helper for help. Lord, thank you for healing me in so many ways and continuing to rescue me from my tendency toward religion and Pharisaical actions Lord. Thank you that you have healing for all of us. You have forgiveness for all of us. And I just pray that we would pursue you in a way that heals us and helps us love others well in Jesus name amen.

- Amen.