



Commentary on Romans

"The Gospel of God"

Chapter 2:1-29

By

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Introduction

"Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things."

Romans 2:1-2

This is the 60th part in our study of Romans. Here's **what I wrote** almost six years ago as we began our study –

"The **Book of Romans** is the "mountain peak" of the Apostle Paul's inspired Writings. This great Book demonstrates the Power of God over sin and the astonishing efficacy of His Grace. Romans is Paul's triumphant exposition about the truly amazing Grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is through Romans that we learn about the sinfulness of sin and the Righteousness of God. We learn about the wrath of God revealed from Heaven against all sin. Paul writes about the extreme penalty for sin for all members of the human race and the extreme **payment** for sin by God's Son, Jesus Christ. It is in Romans that we see the horror of sin and the honor of the sinless Sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross. God is the Judge of sin. Jesus is the Propitiation for that sin. We learn through Romans that God frees sinning slaves to become forgiven saints. God is Sovereign in all the universe and the Source of all Truth."

As we move into the second chapter of Romans, my prayer is that God will speak powerfully through His words to our hearts and minds as we seek to understand this world in which we live and serve.

Romans 2:1-2

διο αναπολογητος ει ω ανθρωπε πας ο κρινων εν ω γαρ κρινεις τον ετερον σεαυτον κατακρινεις τα γαρ αυτα πρασσεις ο κρινων οιδαμεν δε οτι το κριμα του θεου εστιν κατα αληθειαν επι τους τα τοιαυτα πρασσοντας

It’s important to remember that chapter and verse divisions are not part of the original texts of the New Testament. They were added centuries after the apostles wrote their Gospel accounts and letters. The chapter divisions were added in the 13th century AD and the verses in 16th century.

What we read in the early verses of chapter two is a continuation of what we read in chapter one. The context to our current point would read like this

—

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds

and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; *they are* whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them. Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things."

As we move into Romans 2, we must remember that Paul is continuing to present evidence for his primary theme – that of God revealing His wrath “against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”

Inexcusable

Paul brings his many premises in chapter one to a logical conclusion at the beginning of chapter two –

“Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things.”

This is Paul’s primary message to the Romans about the spiritual condition of the human race – they are “inexcusable.”

Remember what Paul wrote in chapter 1 verses 20-21?

“For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”

It is human nature to "excuse" oneself. We often "make excuses" for our behavior, our attitudes and actions. We are often quick to "judge" others, but we "excuse" ourselves thinking that we are being reasonable, logical. Paul's message is clear that in God's eyes, His judgment, we are "without excuse," we are "inexcusable."

The Greek word Paul used in Romans 1:20 and 2:1 is the same – ἀναπολόγητος (*anapologétos*). The word comes from the root ἀπολογία, which carries the idea of defense using logic and reason. Placing ἀ (no, not) before the word ναπολόγητος means that something does not have a logical defense. The human race is without any logical defense against the judgment of God. They are "without excuse."

Self-Condemed

Paul's logic continues with this statement –

“... whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.”

κρίνω (*krinó*) means “to separate, distinguish, choose, make a judgment.” The word was used for determining guilt or innocence, right from wrong.

κατακρίνω (*katakrinó*) intensifies the meaning of the word κρίνω and is translated as “condemn.”

Paul's point in 2:1 is that a depraved sinner (who is without excuse) who judges another person actually condemns themselves. Why? "... for you who judge practice the same things."

How can a person guilty of a crime judge someone who is guilty of committing the same crime? They can't! Justice doesn't work that way. It's not logical, not reasonable, and that's Paul's point. The guilty party is not in a legal position to judge someone who is also a guilty party in the same crime. So, how is it supposed to work?

Truth-Reality Judgment

"But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things."

Paul made an emphatic point that "we know." The Greek word is οἶδαμεν (*oidamen*) and carries the idea of grasping truth (reality) from physical sight. It means "absolute knowledge."

God is the offended party (e.g. Romans 1:18-25) and is in the position to make a judgment "according to truth."

ἀλήθεια (*alétheia*) comes from the word ἀληθής (true in fact) and means "truth, reality." God judges humans from truth-reality.

Our post-modern, post-Christian, post-truth, post-reality world is messed up. We make ridiculous excuses for our beliefs and behavior based on a

lack of logic and reasoning. We think we are being logical and reasonable, but we are not.

God is the only Being who can make a judgment about the human race because He alone **knows** truth and reality. He judges "according to truth."

Paul's Audience?

Before we look at verse 3, let's consider Paul's audience at this point. We know from reading the Book of Romans, the Book of Acts and other ancient documents that the makeup of Christians in Rome included Jews and Gentiles.

One theory is that Jews started the church in Rome. Luke wrote in Acts that "visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes" were in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost and saw the Lord's disciples and heard Peter's sermon (see Acts 2:10 ff). Those Roman Jews and proselytes who believed in Jesus Christ and followed the apostle's doctrine (see Acts 2:40 ff) may have continued to meet together when they returned home to Rome, thus starting the church at Rome.

How then were Gentiles added to the church at Rome? One theory is that the Jews and proselytes who believed in Jesus Christ preached the Gospel to Gentiles in Rome even as some did in Antioch (see Acts 11:18 ff). Another theory comes from an insight we have to the church in Rome from Acts 18 –

"After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers. And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks." Acts 18:1-4

We know from extra-biblical historical documents that the Roman Emperor Claudius expelled thousands of Jews from Rome at a time during his reign that works with the timing of Paul's meeting Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth –

"According to the biographer Suetonius in *Claudius*, during a period of troubles Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome for a short time; Christians may have been involved." [Encyclopedia Britannica](#)

"He banished from Rome all the Jews, who were continually making disturbances at the instigation of one Chrestus." C. Suetonius Tranquillus, *Divus Claudius*, Alexander Thomson, Ed

Some scholars believe that the name *Chrestus* referred to Christ and the problem Claudius was dealing with was arguments between Jews who believed Jesus was the Messiah and Jews who didn't believe.

If all or most of the Jews in the church in Rome had to leave Rome during Claudius' expulsion, then Gentiles in the church would have been in charge for what may have been several years. How would returning Jews interact with Gentiles in the church? We know from Romans 16 that Aquila and Priscilla had a church in their house in Rome prior to Paul writing his letter to the Romans in approximately 56 or 57 AD.

"Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise *greet* the church that is in their house." Romans 16:3-5

Many outlines of the Book of Romans contain these words for chapter two

—

1. The Jews (2:1–3:8)
2. The Need Of The Jews (Rom 2:17-3:8)

I agree that Paul's audience in chapter 2 has a special Jewish focus. We'll see more as we move forward in our study.

Romans 2:3-4

“And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?” Romans 2:3-4

In **earlier studies** we saw that God’s wrath (anger) had been “revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18). God had judicially given the human race up to “uncleanness” and “vile passions” and over to “a debased mind” (Romans 1:24-28). People did what they wanted to do and God would judge them for that (Romans 2:2).

Paul was a brilliant tactician in helping people understand the Gospel of God’s Grace. Jewish believers reading Romans 1, especially the last half, would have been in solid agreement with Paul about God’s righteousness in judging the Gentiles for their sinful ways. However, as Paul so masterfully presents in chapter two, people who judged other people (e.g. Jews judging Gentiles) were “inexcusable” for judging – “for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things” (Romans 2:1). The Jews were guilty of doing the same things and by judging others they actually condemned themselves.

Verse 3

Paul continues to make his point in verse 3 by asking this question – “And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?”

λογιζη δε τουτο ω ανθρωπε ο κρινων τους τα τοιαυτα πρασσοντας και ποιων αυτα οτι συ εκφευξη το κριμα του θεου

Is a person who practices the same things as other sinners in a position to judge those people? The obvious answer is “no.” So, since that is true, can a person who practices the same things as other sinners and judges them “escape the judgment of God?” Again, the obvious answer is “no.”

A literal translation of Romans 2:3 is – “suppose you moreover this o man judging those such things practicing and doing them that you will escape the judgment of God?”

Key Words

κρίνων (*krinón*) means “to separate, distinguish, judge”

πρασσοντας (*prassóntas*) means “perform, accomplish, do”

ἐκφεύγω (*ekpheugó*) means “flee away, escape something”

κρίμα του θεου (*krima tou theou*) means "judgment, verdict, condemnation of God"

Paul already pointed out in verse two that "we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things." The Jews, who were well versed in the Hebrew Scriptures, knew that God always judged according to truth and that His judgments were both good and fair. So, why would they think they would escape God's judgment when they judged the Gentiles for practicing the same disobedience that they (Jews) practiced?

We might imagine at this point that Jews in Rome who read or heard Paul's letter would be feeling a bit nervous and anxious about what was coming next.

Verse 4

Paul pressed his point powerfully in verse four –

"Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?"

η του πλουτου της χρηστοτητος αυτου και της ανοχης και της μακροθυμιας καταφρονεις αγνων οτι το χρηστον του θεου εις μετανοιαν σε αγει

This is something the Jews should have known well from their Holy Book and history – God is very good and long-suffering.

A literal translation of Romans 2:4 is – “or the riches of the kindness of him and forbearance and the patience despising you not knowing that the kindness of God to repentance you leads?”

Key Words

πλοῦτου (*ploutou*) means “riches, wealth, abundance”

χρηστοτητος (*chréstotétos*) means “goodness, kindness, gentleness”

ανοχης (*anochés*) means “delay of punishment, patience, forbearance”

μακροθυμιας (*makrothumias*) means “patience, forbearance, longsuffering” .. it comes from μακρός and θυμός which means “long passion” .. the idea being that God waits a long, long time before expressing His wrath

καταφρονεις (*kataphroneis*) means “despise, scorn”

αγνωων (*agnoón*) means “be ignorant, not know”

χρηστον (*chréston*) means “kind, gentle, pleasant”

μετανοιαν (*metanoian*) means “change of mind, repentance”

Keep in mind as we study together here that Paul was a member of the elite Jewish legal system known as the Pharisees. The name came from an Aramaic word that means "separated, divided." The Pharisees were the conservatives of Judaism in the 1st century AD. Paul said that he studied under the famous Jewish leader and teacher, Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Gamaliel was the son of Simeon ben Hillel and grandson of Hillel the Elder. Gamaliel was the head of the famous House of Hillel and a respected member of the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:34). Paul learned how to be a teacher and enforcer of the Law from Gamaliel and used his vast knowledge and understanding of Judaism and the Law as he wrote to the Romans.

The Jews, of all people, should have understood what Paul meant when he wrote – "the goodness of God leads you to repentance." God's goodness that leads to repentance was deeply embedded in the Hebrew Bible. God called His people to "repent" of their sinful ways and return to Him over a period of hundreds of years. Here are some examples:

King David cried out for God's forgiveness when Nathan the prophet exposed the king's sin –

"Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin *is* always before me." Psalm 51:1-3

The prophet Jeremiah warned the people of Judah before they were taken into captivity, but the people would not listen –

“And the Lord has sent to you all His servants the prophets, rising early and sending *them*, but you have not listened nor inclined your ear to hear. They said, ‘Repent now everyone of his evil way and his evil doings, and dwell in the land that the Lord has given to you and your fathers forever and ever. Do not go after other gods to serve them and worship them, and do not provoke Me to anger with the works of your hands; and I will not harm you.’” Jeremiah 25:4-6

The prophet Ezekiel warned the people who had gone into captivity of the hope that God offered them –

“Therefore speak to them, and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God: ‘Everyone of the house of Israel who sets up his idols in his heart, and puts before him what causes him to stumble into iniquity, and then comes to the prophet, I the Lord will answer him who comes, according to the multitude of his idols, ‘that I may seize the house of Israel by their heart, because they are all estranged from Me by their idols.’ ‘Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord God: ‘Repent, turn away from your idols, and turn your faces away from all your abominations. For anyone of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell in Israel, who separates himself from Me and sets up his idols in his heart and puts before him what causes him to stumble into iniquity, then comes to a prophet to inquire of him concerning Me, I the Lord will answer him by Myself. I will set My face

against that man and make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of My people. Then you shall know that I *am* the Lord." Ezekiel 14:4-8

We could also speak of Hosea, Joel, Amos, Zephaniah and Zechariah where God offered to forgive His people if they would repent of their sinful ways –

"Come, and let us return to the Lord; For He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up." Hosea 6:1

"Now, therefore,' says the Lord, 'Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.'" Joel 2:12

"For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel: 'Seek Me and live.'" Amos 5:4

"Gather yourselves together, yes, gather together, O undesirable nation, Before the decree is issued, Or the day passes like chaff, Before the Lord's fierce anger comes upon you, Before the day of the Lord's anger comes upon you! Seek the Lord, all you meek of the earth, Who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden In the day of the Lord's anger." Zephaniah 2:1-3

“In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to Zechariah the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying, ‘The Lord has been very angry with your fathers. Therefore say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Return to Me,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘and I will return to you,’ says the Lord of hosts.’” Zechariah 1:1-3

In the next part of our study, we will watch as Paul penetrates the hearts and minds of his Jewish audience with the power of the promise of God’s judgment on both Gentile and Jew.

Romans 2:5-6

“Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who ‘will render to each one according to his deeds’: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God.” Romans 2:1-11

We are looking at how Paul continued his strong claims from Romans chapter one about God’s wrath “revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” Paul made it clear to his Jewish readers that they were “inexcusable” and had actually “condemned” themselves in judging Gentiles for their sins because they (Jews) had practiced “the same things.”

In our **last study** we saw this from Paul –

“And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?” Romans 2:3-4

We move now to the next two verses which help bolster Paul’s logic –

“But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who ‘will render to each one according to his deeds ...” Romans 2:5-6

κατα δε την σκληροτητα σου και αμετανοητον καρδιαν θησαυριζεις σεαυτω
οργην εν ημερα οργης και αποκαλυψεως δικαιοκρισιας του θεου ος
αποδωσει εκαστω κατα τα εργα αυτου

σκληροτητα (*sklérotéta*) is from σκληρός (*skléros*) which means “hard from being dry, violent, harsh.) The idea of *sklérotéta* is a hardness of heart. It’s a person who is continually obstinate (stubborn). The Jews who knew their Bibles well would have recognized that term because being stubborn was part of their history.

In Psalm 78, King David wrote that Jews were a “stubborn” people – “And may not be like their fathers, A stubborn and rebellious generation, A generation *that* did not set its heart aright, And whose spirit was not faithful to God.”

The prophet Hosea wrote that “Israel is stubborn Like a stubborn calf ...” (Hosea 4:16)

God called Jews, who were His people, stubborn –

“And He said to me: ‘Son of man, I am sending you to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day. For *they are* impudent and stubborn children. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God.’ As for them, whether they hear or whether they refuse—for they *are* a rebellious house—yet they will know that a prophet has been among them.” Ezekiel 2:3-5

Stubbornness is related to rebellion, as we see in Ezekiel and other Old Testament references. What is the answer to a rebellious attitude? The Bible is quite clear about that. The answer is **repentance**. However, Paul points out in Romans that some Jews were unrepentant.

αμετανοητων (*ametanoéton*) is the negative of μετανοέω (*metanoéo*), “repent, change mind.” The word *ametanoéton* means “unrepentant, impenitent.”

καρδιαν (*kardian*) was a word the ancient Greeks used for their "inner self." It was the seat of their emotions and will (intention).

Paul accused the Jews of having minds, emotions and will that were **hardened** against God and **unrepentant** toward Him. Strong words indeed.

Paul wasn't finished. He accused them of actually **storing up** for themselves the judgment of God in the same way they would store up **treasure!**

θησαυριζεις (*thésaurizeis*) means "store up, treasure up" something for future use. The delay of God's judgment actually gave the Jews more time to store up for themselves (in the same way someone would store up a treasure for themselves) the terrible wrath of God.

σεαυτω (*seauto*) is a pronoun that means "yourself."

οργην (*orgén*) means "anger, wrath." In the context of Paul's writing, this refers back to God's wrath.

Do you see the power of this statement? Paul told the Jews that their hardened, unrepentant hearts were storing up God's wrath for a future time – a time Paul referred to as "the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

εν ημερα οργης (*en hémera orgés*), "the day of wrath" was a well-known theme to Jews –

"For the wicked are reserved for the day of doom; They shall be brought out on the day of wrath." Job 21:30

"The Lord *is* at Your right hand; He shall execute kings in the day of His wrath." Psalm 110:5

"Behold, the day of the Lord comes, Cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, To lay the land desolate; And He will destroy its sinners from it." Isaiah 13:9

"Therefore I will shake the heavens, And the earth will move out of her place, In the wrath of the Lord of hosts And in the day of His fierce anger." Isaiah 13:13

"They will throw their silver into the streets, And their gold will be like refuse; Their silver and their gold will not be able to deliver them In the day of the wrath of the Lord; They will not satisfy their souls, Nor fill their stomachs, Because it became their stumbling block of iniquity." Ezekiel 7:19

"The great day of the Lord *is* near; *It is* near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the Lord is bitter; There the mighty men shall cry out. That day *is* a day of wrath, A day of trouble and distress, A day of devastation and desolation, A day of darkness and gloominess, A day

of clouds and thick darkness, A day of trumpet and alarm Against the fortified cities And against the high towers. 'I will bring distress upon men, And they shall walk like blind men, Because they have sinned against the Lord; Their blood shall be poured out like dust, And their flesh like refuse.' Neither their silver nor their gold Shall be able to deliver them In the day of the Lord's wrath; But the whole land shall be devoured By the fire of His jealousy, For He will make speedy riddance Of all those who dwell in the land." Zephaniah 1:14-18

The thought that the wrath of Yaweh would be stored up against obstinate and unrepentant Jews would be terrifying to some of the Jews who read Paul's words. They thought of themselves as God's people, but Paul was saying they needed to seriously reconsider their relationship with the Almighty.

αποκαλυψεως (*apokalypseōs*) means "unveiling, uncovering" and is a noun often translated "revelation."

δικαιοκρισιας (*dikaiokrisias*) comes from the combination of *díkaios* (righteous) and *krísis* (judgment) and means "righteous judgment, just judgment."

του θεου (*του Theou*) means "of God."

Paul was saying clearly that a day of judgment was coming for the unrepentant Jews. God would reveal (unveil) His wrath against them in righteous judgment.

It's interesting to compare the wrath of God in Romans 1:18 with the wrath of God in Romans 2:5.

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” Romans 1:18

This is a “present” wrath – “is revealed from heaven.” Gentiles are still dealing with that present wrath today. God gives them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, “to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever.”

That's the current way God is dealing with Gentiles. However, there is an even more terrible wrath that will be revealed in the future for Gentiles and Jews –

“But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.” Romans 2:5

This is a “future” wrath – “you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation.” Even as the Gentiles brought God's judgment upon themselves by suppressing the truth in unrighteousness, the Jews brought God's judgment upon themselves through hearts that were hardened and unrepentant.

Paul continues in verse 6 – “who ‘will render to each one according to his deeds.”

ος αποδωσει εκαστω κατα τα εργα αυτου

ος αποδωσει (*hos apodōsei*) means “who will restore, give back, render as due.”

εκαστω κατα (*hekastō kata*) means “to everyone according to.”

τα εργα αυτου (*ta erga autou*) means “the work, labor, actions, deeds of them.”

God will render to every person what is due them according to (based on) their works, their actions, their deeds. Like other prophecies in the Bible, it will happen. That is a frightening thought.

Here’s another way to look at it – if God rendered to every person what they deserved according to their works, who could stand? God’s judgment will be righteous (just, fair, based on the facts), so the prospect of facing that with a hardened and unrepentant heart is terrifying. The Jews stubbornly resisted God’s goodness and they would pay for that resistance when God judges in the future.

“The Jews thought themselves a holy people, entitled to their privileges by right, while they were unthankful, rebellious, and unrighteous. But all who act thus, of every nation, age, and description, must be reminded

that the judgment of God will be according to their real character. The case is so plain, that we may appeal to the sinner's own thoughts."

Matthew Henry

In the next part of our study, we will see what is ahead for people as they face the righteous judgment of God.

Romans 2:7-11

“Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who ‘will render to each one according to his deeds’: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God.” Romans 2:1-11

The Apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Romans approximately 25 years after the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Even though a quarter of a century is a relatively short period of time in history, a lot happened between the Resurrection and Paul’s writing his letter to Romans. Paul was the chief prosecutor of the early Church, but became its most powerful preacher after he was saved during a direct encounter with the risen Christ.

Paul had received two great educations in his life: at the feet of one of the best-known rabbinical leaders of the 1st century, Gamaliel, and at the feet of the eternal Lord of Glory, Jesus Christ. Paul’s knowledge of Judaism and the Law was without parallel and his personal experience and knowledge under the leadership of Jesus and the Holy Spirit placed him in a unique position to write letters to individual churches, like the letter to the Romans.

In our **last study** we looked at Romans 2:5-6 –

“But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who ‘will render to each one according to his deeds ...”

We move now to verses 7-11 –

“...eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God.”

Lots of important things to see here, so we'll look at each verse carefully.

Verse 7

"eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality"

τοις μεν καθ υπομονην εργου αγαθου δοξαν και τιμην και αφθαρσιαν
ζητουσιν ζωην αιωνιον

Paul moved from the idea that God "will render to each one according to his deeds" to explain what that rendering (ἀποδίδωμι – give back, return, restore) would include. God is going to judge people and give them what they "stored up, treasured up" for themselves (v. 5).

Paul introduced his readers to two oppositional categories of people in verses 7 and 8. He began with those who did "good" works.

τοις μεν καθ (*tois men kath*) – literally, "to those that indeed with"

υπομονην (*hypomonén*) means "endurance, steadfastness, patiently waiting for."

εργου αγαθου (*ergou agathou*) translates literally as "in work good."

δοξαν (*doxa*) means "honor, renown, glory." A corresponding word in the Old Testament, כבוד (*kabowd*). Both words carry the idea of "to be heavy" and the intrinsic worth (value) of something or someone.

και (*kai*) "and"

τιμην (*timé*) comes from *tiō*, "pay respect," and is a noun that means "a price, a value."

και (*kai*) "and"

αφθαρσιαν (*aphtharsian*) is a noun and means "indestructibility, incorruptibility", thus "immortality."

ζητο (*zétó*) means "to seek by inquiring."

ζωην (*zóén*) is a noun that means "life, existence." That would include physical and spiritual life.

αιωνιον (*aiónion*) is an adjective and means "age-long, eternal, unending."

This is the first time in Romans that Paul used the words "life eternal." He used them to make a significant point with the Jews reading his letter because they viewed eternal life as something they would gain because of being Jewish. Paul wrote that being born a Jew or Gentile didn't determine where either would spend eternity.

Caution

Upon reading verse 7, some people have attempted to claim that Paul taught a works-oriented salvation. Not so. Paul is presenting a case, much like a lawyer would in a court of law, so he's presenting evidence methodically, logically – one point at a time – that will lead to his conclusion. Even as it would be a mistake to claim to understand a lawyer's final conclusion early in his legal presentation, we would make a **big** mistake to attempt to reach a conclusion about the point Paul was making by trying to interpret it all based on verse 7. Paul's theme continues to be the wrath of God and His righteous judgment on all people, Gentiles and Jews.

Let's keep reading.

Verse 8

“... but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath ...”

τοὺς δὲ ἐξ ἐριθείας καὶ ἀπειθοῦσιν μὲν τὴν ἀληθείαν πειθομένοις δὲ τὴν ἀδικίαν
θυμὸς καὶ ὀργή

Paul now describes the second oppositional category of people – those who do not do “good” works.

τοις δε εξ (*tois de ex*) is literally "to those however of."

εριθειας (*eritheias*) is a noun and means "self-seeking, ambition, rivalry."

και (*kai*) "and"

απειθουσιν (*apeithousin*) is a verb and means "rebel, disobey." It literally means "refuse to be persuaded."

τη αληθεια (*té alétheia*) means "the truth."

Paul was addressing people who sought their own way through ambition and rivalry and rebelled/disobeyed "the truth."

πειθομενοις (*peithomenois*) is a verb that means "persuade, urge."

δε τη (*de té*) "however"

αδικια (*adikia*) is a noun that means "unrighteousness, injustice."

θυμος (*thumos*) is a noun that means "wrath, passionate outburst."

και (*kai*) "and"

οργη (*orgé*) means "anger, wrath, passion."

Verse 9

“tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek”

θλιψις και στενοχωρια επι πασαν ψυχην ανθρωπου του κατεργαζομενου το κακον ιουδαιου τε πρωτον και ελληνος

Verse 9 is a continuation of the description for the category of people introduced in verse 8.

θλιψις (*thlipsis*) is a noun that means “pressure, affliction, persecution.”

και (*kai*) “and”

στενοχωρια (*stenocho^oria*) is a noun that means “great distress.” It comes from *stenos*, “narrow,” and *cho^ora*, “space.” The word literally means “narrow space” in the sense of a difficult situation or circumstance. The unbelieving, disobedient person will experience both outer and inner affliction and pressure.

επι (*epi*) “upon”

πασαν (*pasan*) “every”

ψυχην (*psuchén*) is a noun that means “the soul, self.”

ανθρωπου (*anthrópou*) is a noun that means “member of the human race, mankind.” Paul presented a problem for every member of the human race, not just “some” based on ethnicity as Jews would presume.

κατεργαζομενου (*katergazomenou*) is a verb that means “work out, achieve, produce, accomplish.” It literally means “work down to the end point.”

κακον (*kakon*) is an adjective that means “inner evil, bad, wicked.” The idea is of something that is rotten.

ιουδαιου (*Ioudaiou*) is an adjective that means “Jewish.”

πρωτον (*próton*) is an adverb that means “first, before.”

και (*kai*) “and also”

ελληνος (*Hellénos*) is a noun that means “Hellene, Greek.”

Reading verses 8 & 9 in context –

“... but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek ...”

Now Paul moves his case up a notch. This impacts Jews and Gentiles.

Why the Jew first? Paul will explain soon enough.

Verse 10

“... but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

δοξα δε και τιμη και ειρηνη παντι τω εργαζομενω το αγαθον ιουδαιω τε
πρωτον και ελληνι

Paul continues his comparison of the person who does bad (evil) to the person who does good. The person who does bad (“self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness”) will receive “indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish.” What will the person who does good receive?

δοξα (*doxa*) “glory”

και (*kai*) “and”

τιμη (*timé*) “honor”

και (*kai*) “and”

ειρηνη (*eiréné*) "peace"

παντι (*panti*) "to everyone"

εργαζομενω (*ergazomenó*) "work, perform"

αγαθον (*agathon*) "intrinsically good"

ιουδαιου (*Ioudaiou*) "Jewish"

πρωτον (*próton*) "first, before"

και (*kai*) "and also"

ελληνι (*Helléni*) "Hellene, Greek"

Again, it's important that we not reach a theological conclusion about salvation based on this verse until we allow the Apostle Paul to finish his case and present his conclusion. It's coming soon.

Verse 11

"For there is no partiality with God."

ου γαρ εστιν προσωποληψια παρα τω θεω

It is difficult for us in the 21st century to comprehend the power of this statement to Jews in the 1st century. They thought of themselves as God's "chosen people," God's "favored children," God's "elect." This statement by the Apostle Paul would have stunned the Jewish readers of the letter to Romans.

ου γαρ εστιν (*ou gar estin*) literally "not indeed there is"

προσωποληψια (*prosópolémpsia*) is a noun that means "partiality, favoritism." It comes from another noun, *prosópolémptés*, which means "one who shows partiality."

παρα τω θεω (*para tó theó*) "with God"

God does NOT show favorites, Paul claims, when it comes to blessing those who do good and judging those who do evil.

"For God shows no partiality [no arbitrary favoritism; with Him one person is not more important than another]." Amplified Bible

"In his capacity as a Judge, it is applied often to God. It means that he will not be influenced in awarding the retributions of eternity, in actually pronouncing and executing sentence, by any partiality, or by regard to the wealth, function, rank, or appearance of people. He will judge righteous judgment; he will judge people as they ought to be judged; according to their character and deserts; and not contrary to their character, or by partiality." Barnes Notes

Romans 2:12-16

“For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law (for not the hearers of the law *are* just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves *their* thoughts accusing or else excusing *them*) in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.” Romans 2:12-16

One of the questions I hear most often from both Christians and non-Christians is “what happens to people when they die if they never heard about Jesus?” The Apostle Paul is about to give us some insight.

Paul used this phrase twice in the previous sentences (vss. 9-10) – “the Jew first and also of the Greek.” A primary difference between the Jews and Greeks (Gentiles) in reference to God (*Yaweh*) is the Mosaic Law (*Torah*). God gave the Law to the Jews and promised from the giving of the Law that He would judge them according to the Law.

“And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, *and*

to keep the commandments of the Lord and His statutes which I command you today for your good?" Deuteronomy 10:12-13

That's what Paul is saying in Romans 2 – "as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law." Jews, Paul wrote, would be judged by the Mosaic Law.

What about non-Jews? Would God judge them according to the Mosaic Law. The answer is clearly "no." So what does that mean for non-Jews then and today? If God would not use His Law to judge them, what would He use? Let's look at the evidence.

Verse 12

"For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law."

οσοι γαρ ανομωσ ημαρτον ανομωσ και απολουνται και οσοι εν νομω ημαρτον δια νομου κριθησονται

οσοι γαρ (*hosoi gar*) "as many as indeed"

ανομωσ (*anomós*) is an adverb that means "without law, lawlessly"

ημαρτον (*hémarton*) is a verb that means "miss the mark, sin."

ανομωσ (*anomós*) "without law"

και (*kai*) "also"

απολουνται (*apolountai*) is a verb that means "perishing, lose, destroy."

και (*kai*) "and"

οσοι (*hosoi*) "as many as"

εν (*en*) "in"

νομω (*nomó*) means "law"

ημαρτον (*hémarton*) "miss the mark, sin"

δια (*dia*) "by"

νομου (*nomou*) "law"

κριθησονται (*krithésonati*) is a verb that means "judge, decide." Future tense, indicative mood, passive voice – "will be judged."

"For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without [regard to] the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged *and* condemned by the Law." Amplified Bible

Paul's statement seems straightforward – sinning Greeks would perish without regard to the Mosaic Law and sinning Jews would be judged and

condemned by the Mosaic Law. However, before coming to any conclusions yet, let's see what Paul says next.

Verse 13

“(for not the hearers of the law *are* just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified”

ου γαρ οι ακροαται του νομου δικαιοι παρα τω θεω αλλ οι ποιηται του νομου δικαιωθησονται

ου γαρ (*ou gar*) “not indeed”

οι (*hoi*) “the”

ακροαται (*akroatai*) is a noun that means “hearer, listener.”

νομου (*nomou*) “law”

δικαιοι (*dikaioi*) is an adjective that means “just, righteous”

παρα (*para*) “with”

θεω (*theó*) is a noun that means “God.”

αλλ οι (*all hoi*) “but the”

ποιηται (*poiétai*) is a noun that means "a doer, performer."

νομου (*nomou*) "law"

δικαιωθησονται (*dikaióthsontai*) is a verb that means "make righteous, justify, acquit." Future tense, indicative mood, passive voice – "will be made righteous, will be justified, will be acquitted."

This verse reminds me of what Jesus said in Luke 11:28 – "blessed *are* those who hear the word of God and keep it!" And what Jesus' brother James wrote in his letter – "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." (James 1:22)

Paul continues making his case by pointing out that "hearing" the Mosaic Law, which is something Jews did every Sabbath, was not enough. They also needed to be "doers" of the Law to be justified. But is that even possible? Can anyone obey every Law?

Verse 14

"for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves"

οταν γαρ εθνη τα μη νομον εχοντα φυσει τα του νομου ποιη ουτοι νομον μη εχοντες εαυτοις εισιν νομος

We are now entering into Gentile territory where Paul may answer questions about what happens to Gentiles who are not under Mosaic Law and don't hear the Gospel of Christ. Will we find the answer here?

οταν γαρ (*otan gar*) "when indeed"

εθνη (*ethné*) is a noun that means "nations, Gentiles."

μη (*mé*) "not"

νομον (*nomon*) "law"

εχοντα (*echonta*) is a verb that means "possess, have, hold." Present tense, Participle Mood, Active Voice, Nominative Case – "having"

φυσει (*phusei*) is a noun that means "origin, inherent nature."

τα του (*ta tou*) "the things of the"

νομου (*nomou*) "law"

ποιη (*poié*) is a verb that means "do, make, practice."

ουτοι (*houtoi*) "these"

νομον μη (*nomon mé*) "law not"

εχοντες (*echontes*) "possess, have, hold." Present tense, Participle Mood, Active Voice, Nominative Case – "having"

εαυτοις (*eautois*) "to themselves"

εισιν (*eisin*) "are"

νομος (*nomos*) "law"

"When Gentiles, who do not have the Law [since it was given only to Jews], do instinctively the things the Law requires [guided only by their conscience], they are a law to themselves, though they do not have the Law." Amplified Bible

God gave Jews the Mosaic Law. What did He give Gentiles? A natural conscience – *phusei*. Paul addressed that earlier in Romans when he wrote these words –

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them."

And ...

"For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature.

Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due."

The words "natural" and "nature" are *phusikos* and *phusis*. God gave the Gentiles important gifts – the "truth" (*alétheia*) and their "inherent nature" (*phusis*). Paul was saying that Gentiles would be judged based on what God had given them even as God would judge Jews on what He had given them (Mosaic Law).

Verse 15

"who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves *their* thoughts accusing or else excusing *them*)"

οιτινες ενδεικνυνται το εργον του νομου γραπτον εν ταις καρδιαις αυτων συμμαρτυρουσης αυτων της συνειδησεως και μεταξυ αλληλων των λογισμων κατηγορουντων η και απολογουμενων

οιτινες ενδεικνυνται το εργον του νομο (*oitines endeiknuntai to ergon tou nomo*) literally translates as "who show the work of the law." Paul referred back to the Gentles in the previous verse "who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves."

Paul now says that those Gentiles "show" the "work" of the "law." What does he mean by that?

The Greek word *endeiknuntai* is a present tense verb that means "show forth, prove, make fully evident." What do they "show forth, prove, make fully evident?" *to ergon tou nomo* – "the work of the law."

ergon is a noun that means "labor, deed, action, task, employment." The idea is that it is a deed or action that carries out an inner purpose, an inner desire.

This deed that carries out an inner desire is *tou nomo* – "of the law." Gentiles "show forth, prove" the "deed, work, action" of the "law." That's an interesting statement in light of the fact that the Mosaic Law was **not** given to Gentiles. What did Paul mean?

γραπτον εν ταις καρδιαις αυτων (*grapton en tais kardiais auton*) translate literally as "written in the hearts of them."

Paul meant that Gentiles had the "law" of God "written" in their "hearts." What?

grapton is an adjective that means "written."

kardiais is a noun that means "heart, inner life, inner intention."

Paul meant that the "law" of God was "written" on the "inner life" of Gentiles. How does that work?

The next words will help our understanding.

συμμαρτυρουσης αυτων της συνειδησεως (*summarturousés autón té suneidéseós*) translates literally as "bearing witness their conscience."

summarturousés is a verb that means "bearing witness together with."

suneidéseós is a noun that means "the conscience." It comes from combining *sýn*, "together with," and *eídō*, "to know, see." It was understood as a joining of the moral and spiritual "knowledge" to know from right and wrong. The Gentiles didn't have the Mosaic Law, but they did have an "inner conscience" that God gave them to know what was right and what was wrong.

και μεταξυ αλληλων (*kai metaxu allelón*) translates literally as "and between one another."

των λογισμων κατηγορουντων (*tón logismón katégorountón*) is literally "the thoughts accusing."

logismón is a noun that means "reasoning, thinking."

katégorountón is a verb that means "accuse, charge, prosecute." The word comes from *agoreuó*, which means means "speak in the assembly."

η και απολογουμενων (*é kai apologoumenón*) is literally "or also defending."

Apologists will certainly recognize the Greek word for "defending." It's *apologoumenón* and means "give a defense." The idea of the word is to reason from a position of sound logic.

The Amplified Version translates verse 15 this way –

"They show that the essential requirements of the Law are written in their hearts; and their conscience [their sense of right and wrong, their moral choices] bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or perhaps defending them."

This gives us a good sense in the English language about what's going on in the mind and heart of an unsaved Gentile. God has placed inside every person the "essential requirements of the Law" and their conscience [sense of right and wrong, moral choices] bears witness inside of them in such a way that their own thoughts alternately accuse or defend them.

Greeks understood this idea as *agraphos nomos* (unwritten law). Expositors explains it this way –

"To the Greeks, however, this was something greater and more sacred than any statute, or civil constitution; to the Apostle it was less than the great revelation of God's will, which had been made and interpreted to Israel, but nevertheless a true moral authority. There is a triple proof that

Gentiles, who are regarded as not having law, are a law to themselves. (1) The appeal to their conduct: as interpreted by the Apostle, their conduct evinces, at least in some, the possession of a law written on the heart; (2) the action of conscience: it joins its testimony, though it be only an inward one, to the outward testimony borne by their conduct; and (3) their thoughts. Their thoughts bear witness to the existence of a law in them, inasmuch as in their mutual intercourse (μεταξὺ ἀλλήλων) these thoughts are busy bringing accusations, or in rarer cases (ἢ καί) putting forward defences, i.e., in any case, exercising moral functions which imply the recognition of a law." *Expositors Greek Testament*, Dr. James Denney, 1900

Verse 16

"in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel."

εν ημερα οτε κρινει ο θεος τα κρυπτα των ανθρωπων κατα το ευαγγελιον μου δια ιησου χριστου

Paul returns to his primary theme of God's past and present righteous anger and His future judgment.

εν ημερα (*en heméra*) "on that day" refers to the same "day" Paul mentioned in 2:5 – "the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

οτε κρινει ο θεος (*hote krinei ho theos*) "when will judge God"

τα κρυπτα (*ta krupta*) "the secrets" (hidden secrets, inward nature)

των ανθρωπων (*tón anthrópon*) "of men"

κατα το ευαγγελιον μου δια ιησου χριστου (*kata to euangelion mou dia iésou christou*) "according to the gospel of me by Christ Jesus"

"on that day when, as my gospel proclaims, God will judge the secrets [all the hidden thoughts and concealed sins] of men through Christ Jesus." Amplified Version

"in the day when judges the hidden things of men according to my gospel through Jesus Christ." Wuest Literal Translation

What did Paul mean when he wrote that God would judge people according to his Gospel? God has a standard He will use to judge people on "the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" and He revealed that standard to Paul.

We are reminded of when Paul preached a similar message to the Greeks in Athens. Judgment Day is a fixed day that God has determined to judge the world –

"The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on

which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." Acts 17:30-31

God is going to judge the world in righteousness by His Son, Jesus Christ, whom He rose from the dead giving assurance that His judgment is coming.

So, what about the question we asked at the beginning of this study – "what happens to people when they die if they never heard about Jesus?" There have been and are Jews and Gentiles who have not heard about Jesus –

1. God will judge Jews according to the Mosaic Law.
2. God will judge Gentiles according to their conscience that contains the moral law written on their hearts. That includes the "secrets" of each person.

I think it's important for us to remember that God knew what the Mosaic Law was going to be before He gave it to Moses. In fact, God knew what His Law would be before He created the heavens and the earth. God's Law is part of His character, so it has an *eternal* heritage. What Paul told the Romans is that God "wrote" His Law in people's hearts from the beginning. That is why Paul could write these words –

"For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal

power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened." Romans 1:20-21

God knows what every person "knows" and has "done" and will judge them accordingly.

"Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire." Revelation 20:11-15

Romans 2:17-24

“Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, and know *His* will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? For ‘the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,’ as it is written.” Romans 2:17-24

In our **last study** we learned more about how God will judge Jews and Gentiles “in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who ‘will render to each one according to his deeds.’” (Romans 2:5-6) The Apostle Paul turned his attention squarely toward his fellow Jews in Romans 2:17.

If you compare what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Jews at the beginning of Romans 2 and what he says beginning with verse 17, it’s obvious that he is turning up the heat on them. It’s important to remember that Paul “loved” his fellow Jews.

[**Spoiler alert:** this is what Paul wrote about Jews later in his letter to the Romans]

"I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom *pertain* the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service *of God*, and the promises; of whom *are* the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ *came*, who is over all, *the* eternally blessed God. Amen." Romans 9:1-5

Let's keep that in mind as we look at what Paul wrote to the Jews in Romans 2:17-24.

Verse 17

"Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God ..."

ἴδε συ ἰουδαῖος ἐπονομαζῆ καὶ ἐπαναπαυῆ τῷ νόμῳ καὶ καυχᾶσαι ἐν θεῷ

ἴδε συ ἰουδαῖος (*ide su ioudaios*) "if however you a Jew"

ἐπονομαζῆ καὶ ἐπαναπαυῆ τῷ νόμῳ (*eponomazé kai epanapaué to nomó*)
"name yourself and rely on the law"

και καυχασαι εν θεω (*kai kauchasai en theó*) "and boast in God"

Paul begins by telling the Jews something he knows about them. They call themselves Jews, rely on the Mosaic Law and "boast" in God. Boasting is something the Jews did a lot, and for good reason. God chose them to be His people. He had called them out of slavery in Egypt and given them His Law through His prophet Moses. The Jewish people failed God most of the time during their history as a chosen nation, but they still boasted about their special relationship to God.

Paul is about to make a point about Jews that will hit them hard, but it's important to remember that Paul wrote from experience. He had been like them prior to meeting Jesus Christ, so he understood them and knew what they needed to hear from him.

Verse 18

"and know *His* will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law"

και γινωσκεις το θελημα και δοκιμαζεις τα διαφορονητα κατηχουμενος εκ του νομου

και γινωσκεις το θελημα (*kai ginóskeis to theléma*) "and know the will"

και δοκιμαζεις τα (*kai dokimazeis ta*) "and approve the things". The word *dokimazeis* is a verb that means "put to the test, prove, examine."

διαφεροντα (*diapheronta*) is a verb that means "excel, carry through, surpass, differ."

κατηχουμενος (*katéchoumenos*) is a verb that means "instruct orally, teach, inform."

εκ του νομου (*ek tou nomou*) "out of the law"

Look at how Paul is moving the evidence: the Jews "knew" God's will, had "proven" the things that were excellent, had been "instructed" out of the Mosaic Law. They were definitely a privileged group.

Verse 19

"and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness"

πεποιθας τε σεαυτον οδηγον ειναι τυφλων φως των εν σκοτει

πεποιθας (*pepoithas*) verb that means "persuaded, urged"

τε σεαυτον οδηγον ειναι (*te seauton odegon einai*) "you yourself a guide are" .. the word *odegon* is a noun that means "leader, teacher, guide."

τυφλων (*tuphlón*) is an adjective that means "blind" physically or mentally.

φως των εν σκοτει (*phos tón en skotei*) "a light to those in darkness"

Paul continues to build his case against the Jews. They viewed themselves as a guide to the blind and a light in the darkness and that's what they *should* have been given all of the direct instruction they had received from God for more than a thousand years earlier (at the time Paul wrote Romans).

I'm reminded about what Jesus said to the Pharisees –

“Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged *to perform it.*’ Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold?” Matthew 23:16-17

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier *matters* of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!” Matthew 23:23-24

In the famous Messianic passage of Isaiah 42, God said –

“I, the Lord, have called You in righteousness, And will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the Gentiles, To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the prison, Those who sit in darkness from the prison house.” Isaiah 42:6-7

Jesus spoke these words in the synagogue at Nazareth –

“The Spirit of the Lord *is* upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to *the* poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to *the* captives And recovery of sight to *the* blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” Luke 4:18-19

Jesus healed many blind people during His ministry in fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy concerning the Messiah. Jesus was more than a *guide* to the blind – He was their **healer**.

Verse 20

“an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law.”

παιδευτην αφρωνων διδασκαλον νηπιων εχοντα την μορφωσιν της γνωσεως και της αληθειας εν τω νομω

παιδευτην (*paideutén*) is a noun that means “instructor, trainer”

αφρωνων (*aphronón*) is an adjective that means “foolish, senseless”

διδασκαλον (*didaskalon*) is a noun that means “teacher”

νηπιων (*népión*) is an adjective that means “infant, child, unlearned”

εχοντα την μορφωσιν (*echonta tén morphósin*) "having the embodiment" .. *morphósin* is a noun that means "form, outline"

της γνωσεως (*tés gnóseós*) "of knowledge" (knowledge that comes from first-hand experience, wisdom)

και της αληθειας (*kai tés alétheias*) "and of the truth" (truth to fact, reality)

εν τω νομω (*en tó nomó*) "in the law"

Paul told the Jews what they believed about themselves – instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law – but he's about to burst their bubble with a powerful series of questions. Jews had many spiritual advantages, but had wasted them on personal aggrandizement and self-righteousness. Paul will use a very interesting approach to show the Jews how they fell short of God's expectations for them.

Verse 21

"You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal?"

ο ουν διδασκων ετερον σεαυτον ου διδασκεις ο κηρυσσων μη κλεπτειν κλεπτεις

ο ουν διδασκων ετερον (*ho oun didaskón heteron*) "you then teaching another"

σεαυτον ου διδασκει (*seauton ou didaskei*) "yourself not do you teach"

ο κηρυσσων μη κλεπτειν κλεπτεις (*ho kerussén mé kleppeis*) "you preaching not to steal do you steal"

Paul is digging into the hypocrisy of the Jews. They didn't practice what they preached.

Verse 22

"You who say, 'Do not commit adultery,' do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?"

ο λεγων μη μοιχευειν μοιχευεις ο βδελυσσομενος τα ειδωλα ιεροσυλεις

ο λεγων μη μοιχευειν (*ho legón mé moicheuein*) "you saying not to commit adultery"

μοιχευεις (*moicheueis*) "do you commit adultery"

ο βδελυσσομενος τα ειδωλα (*ho bdelussomenon ta eidóla*) "you abhorring idols" .. *bdelussomenon* means "detest, loathe, abhor" .. *eidóla* means "false god, an idol"

ιεροσυλεις (*ierosuleis*) "do you rob temples" .. one idea of *ierosuleis* here is that the Jews had taken plunder, treasures, riches from pagan temples. Another idea is that the Jews had failed to pay the Jewish temple tax. Paul asks one more pointed question to the Jews.

Verse 23

"You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law?"

ος εν νομω καυχασαι δια της παραβασεως του νομου τον θεον ατιμαζεις

ος εν νομω καυχασαι (*hos en nomó kauchasai*) "you who in law boast" (glory, boast)

δια της παραβασεως του νομου (*dia tés parabaseós tou nomou*) "through the transgression of the law" .. *parabaseós* means "deviation, overstepping, transgression"

τον θεον ατιμαζεις (*ton theon atimazeis*) "God dishonor you" .. *atimazeis* is a verb that means "disgrace, insult, dishonor"

Paul's last question sounds like an accusation. It's almost a summary of the earlier questions. Jews boasted in the law, but were actually insulting God by breaking the law in which they boasted.

Paul is done with questions. It's time to take the Jews to the woodshed.

Verse 24

“For ‘the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,’ as it is written.”

το γαρ ονομα του θεου δι υμας βλασφημειται εν τοις εθνεσιν καθως γεγραπται

το γαρ ονομα του θεου (*to gar onoma tou theou*) “the indeed name of God”

δι υμας βλασφημειται (*di umas blasthémēita*) “through you is blasphemed” .. *blasthémēita* is a verb that means “speak evil against”

εν τοις εθνεσιν (*en tois ethnesin*) “among the gentiles”

καθως γεγραπται (*kathós gegraptai*) “as it has been written”

These words would sting a Jew and Paul knew it. The Jews, who believed themselves to be the chosen people of God in the world, had actually brought dishonor on God’s name and caused Gentiles to speak evil of God because of them (the Jews).

Let’s not miss the power of Paul’s words. Paul accused Jews of causing blasphemy to be spoken by outsiders because of their actions. God would not stand for any Jew to blaspheme His name –

“And whoever blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall certainly stone him, the stranger as well as him who is born in the land. When he blasphemes the name *of the Lord*, he shall be put to death.” Leviticus 24:16

Paul certainly had the Jews attention with his questions and accusation. Gentiles believed in many gods and their response to those gods was often based on the behavior of the people who worshipped the gods. Paul pointed to the hypocrisy of the Jews and told them that the Gentiles blasphemed *Yaweh* because of the behavior of the Jews. Strong words indeed.

Paul didn't mention which Scripture he was referring to when he wrote – “as it is written.” It may have been Isaiah 52:5; 2 Samuel 12:14; Ezekiel 36:22 or some other reference in the Old Testament, but the Jews who read Paul's words would have recognized it.

“While God and his law were an honour to them, which they boasted of and prided themselves in, they were a dishonour to God and his law, by giving occasion to those that were without to reflect upon their religion, as if that did countenance and allow of such things, which, as it is their sin who draw such inferences (for the faults of professors are not to be laid upon professions), so it is their sin who give occasion for those inferences, and will greatly aggravate their miscarriages. This was the condemnation in David's case, that he had given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, 2 Sa. 12:14. And the apostle here refers to the same charge against their forefathers: As it is written, v. 24.

He does not mention the place, because he wrote this to those that were instructed in the law (in labouring to convince, it is some advantage to deal with those that have knowledge and are acquainted with the scripture), but he seems to point at Isa. 52:5; Eze. 36:22, 23; and 2 Sa. 12:14. It is a lamentation that those who were made to be to God for a name and for a praise should be to him a shame and dishonour. The great evil of the sins of professors is the dishonour done to God and religion by their profession. "Blasphemed through you; that is, you give the occasion for it, it is through your folly and carelessness. The reproaches you bring upon yourselves reflect upon your God, and religion is wounded through your sides." A good caution to professors to walk circumspectly." Matthew Henry's Commentary on Romans, 1706

Romans 2:25

“For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, *even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law?* For he is not a Jew who *is one* outwardly, nor *is* circumcision that which *is* outward in the flesh; but *he is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise *is* not from men but from God.” Romans 2:25-29

The Apostle Paul put the Jews in Rome through some tough questioning in this letter. We saw in **our last study** that he first told them he knew what they thought of themselves –

- rest on the Law
- make their boast in God
- know His will
- approve the things that are excellent
- being instructed out of the Law
- confident that they are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness
- an instructor of the foolish

- a teacher of babes
- having the form of knowledge and truth in the Law

Then Paul asked the Jews pointed questions for the purpose of showing them that they were not at all what they thought they were, especially in the eyes of God.

- You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself?
- You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal?
- You who say, "Do not commit adultery," do you commit adultery?
- You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?
- You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law?

Paul then drove his point home with this startling accusation –

"For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,' as it is written." Romans 2:24

Paul followed his piercing accusation with a powerful declaration that cut to the heart and soul of Judaism.

Verse 25

“For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.”

περιτομη μεν γαρ ωφελει εαν νομον πρασσης εαν δε παραβατης νομου ης
η περιτομη σου ακροβυστια γεγονεν

περιτομη (*peritomé*) “circumcision”

God gave circumcision to Abraham as part of the ‘Seed’ covenant. The Seed covenant began in the Garden of Eden –

“So the Lord God said to the serpent: ‘Because you have done this, You *are* cursed more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you shall go, And you shall eat dust All the days of your life. And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.’ Genesis 3:14-15

Eve, the wife of Adam and mother of Cain and Abel, said this after she gave birth to Seth –

“For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed.” Genesis 4:25

Eve believed God for the 'Seed' He promised in the Garden and believed Seth would be that 'Seed.' She was correct in that Abraham was a descendant of Seth (genealogy of Seth to Abraham in Genesis 5) and Jesus was a descendant of Abraham (genealogy of Jesus Christ in Matthew 1 and Luke 3).

God called Abram out of paganism (see Joshua 24:2) to leave his home and travel to a land that God would give him –

"I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." Genesis 12:2-3

God promised Abram a child who would be the promised 'Seed,' even though Abram and his wife were old and had not been able to have children.

"And behold, the word of the Lord *came* to him, saying, 'This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.' Then He brought him outside and said, 'Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.' And He said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.' And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness." Genesis 15:4-6

Even though Abram believed God, his wife didn't and talked Abram into sleeping with an Egyptian slave woman so they would have a child. Abram named his son with Hagar, Ishmael. When Ishmael was 13 years old, God appeared to Abram and said –

"I *am* Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.' Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: 'As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. And God said to Abraham: 'As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This *is* My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant. He who is

born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant." Genesis 17:1-14

We see in this portion of God's Word why circumcision was so important to Jews. It was the sign of God's covenant with Abraham and with "every male child in your generations." If a male child was not circumcised, "that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant."

But what about the 'Seed' of promise? Was it Ishmael? Abraham circumcised Ishmael, so he must have been the promised lineage of the 'seed.' Right? Not exactly.

Abraham did have a son with his wife Sarah and called him Isaac. Here's what God said about Isaac and his older half-brother Ishmael –

"So the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned. And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing. Therefore she said to Abraham, 'Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, *namely* with Isaac.' And the matter was very displeasing in Abraham's sight because of his son. But God said to Abraham, 'Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her

voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called. Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he *is* your seed."

Genesis 21:8-13

So, there are now two 'seeds.' How does that work since they were both circumcised. God made it clear to Abraham that "in Isaac your seed shall be called," but He also promised to "make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he is your seed."

Paul wrote a letter to the churches in Galatia several years before he wrote to the Romans and explained the 'two seeds' of Abraham clearly –

"Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he *who was* of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar— for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children— but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written: 'Rejoice, O barren, *You* who do not bear! Break forth and shout, *You* who are not in labor! For the desolate has many more children Than she who has a husband.' Now we, brethren, as Isaac *was*, are children of promise. But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him *who was born* according to the Spirit, even so *it is* now. Nevertheless what does the

Scripture say? 'Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.' So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free."

Galatians 4:21-31

Paul used the word "promise" twice because that is the heart of the covenant to Eve and Abraham. Paul told the Galatians – "Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise." Though both of Abraham's sons were circumcised, Ishmael and Isaac, only one son was 'promised' and that was Isaac.

Just one more verse about the 'Seed' – "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." (Genesis 22:18) I invite you to read Genesis 22:1-19 as it contains great insight to the original promise of God from Genesis 3:15 and its fulfillment in Christ. It's important that we have this background to "circumcision" so we can understand the impact of how Jews would have heard Paul's words in Romans 2:25 – "For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision."

Let's continue –

περιτομη μεν γαρ ωφελει (*peritomé men gar óphelei*) "circumcision indeed profits" .. *óphelei* is a verb that means "help, benefit, do good, profit"

εαν νομον πρασσης (*ean nomen prassés*) "if the law you practice" ..
prassés is a verb that means the process of "accomplishing" a deed

εαν δε παραβατης νομου ης (*ean de parabatés nomou és*) "if however a
transgressor of law you are" .. *parabatés* is a noun that means "lawbreaker,
violator, transgressor"

η περιτομη σου (*hé peritomé sou*) "the circumcision of you"

ακροβυστια γεγονεν (*akrobustia gegonen*) "uncircumcision has become" ..
the word *akrobustia* is used figuratively in the sense that a person would be
outside of God's covenant even if they had been circumcised in the flesh.
The person who was 'uncircumcised' would not belong to the promised
'Seed' through whom the promises of God would come.

This is truly powerful, but Paul is just getting started.

Romans 2:26-29

“For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, *even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law?* For he is not a Jew who *is one* outwardly, nor *is* circumcision that which *is* outward in the flesh; but *he is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise *is* not from men but from God.” Romans 2:25-29

In our last study we looked at verse 25 and Paul’s powerful declaration that “circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.” Circumcision was so important to Jews because it was the sign of God’s covenant to Abraham and his descendants. The idea of becoming “uncircumcision” (which is what they called Gentiles) would have been abhorrent to the Jews.

Paul now takes this idea to an even more powerful level – that of an obedient Gentile judging a Jew!

Verse 26

“Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision?”

εαν ουν η ακροβυστια τα δικαιωματα του νομου φυλασση ουχι η ακροβυστια αυτου εις περιτομην λογισθησεται

εαν ουν η ακροβυστια (*ean oun hé akrobustia*) “if therefore the uncircumcision” .. *akrobustia* means “foreskin” and was a word Jews used for Gentiles.

τα δικαιωματα του νομου φυλασση (*ta dikaiómata tou nomou phulassé*) “the requirement of the law keeps” .. *dikaiómata* means “a thing pronounced to be just, righteous”

ουχι η ακροβυστια αυτου (*ouchi hé akrobustia autou*) “not the uncircumcision of him”

εις περιτομην λογισθησεται (*eis peritomén logisthése tai*) “for circumcision will be reckoned” .. *logisthése tai* means “reason, decide, conclude, reckon, count, charge with” .. it’s the idea of coming to a logical conclusion.

Paul’s logic here is that if uncircumcised Gentiles keeps the Law, they would be regarded as if circumcised. He’s not saying that Gentiles keep the law, but is making a point with the Jews. The Jews had the Law and the

Covenant, but an uncircumcised Gentile who kept the Law would condemn the circumcised Jew who broke the Law. Reminds us of what Jesus said in Luke 11 –

“And while the crowds were thickly gathered together, He began to say, ‘This is an evil generation. It seeks a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. For as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so also the Son of Man will be to this generation. The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon *is* here. The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah *is* here.’”
Luke 11:29-32

Jesus used two Gentile groups (Queen of the South and men of Nineveh) to show the Jews they were an “evil generation.” Paul is saying something similar about Jews and Gentiles.

Jews had all the advantages (Law and Covenant) while Gentiles had none. However, Paul’s point was that a Law-abiding Gentile would be strong evidence against a Law-breaking Jew.

Verse 27

“And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, *even* with *your* written *code* and circumcision, *are* a transgressor of the law?”

και κρινει η εκ φυσεως ακροβυστια τον νομον τελουσα σε τον δια γραμματος και περιτομης παραβατην νομου

και κρινει (*kai krinei*) “and will judge”

η εκ φυσεως ακροβυστια (*hé ek pheuseós akrobustia*) “the by nature uncircumcision” .. *pheuseós* means “inherent nature, birth origin”

τον νομον τελουσα (*eon nomou telousa*) “the law fulfilling” .. *telousa* means “accomplish, finish, fulfill”

σε τον δια γραμματος και περιτομης (*se ton dia grammatos kai peritomés*) “you who with the letter and circumcision”

παραβατην νομου (*parabaten nomou*) “are a transgressor of law” .. *parabaten* means “law-breaker, transgressor”

Paul reminded the Jews that they had received the letter (Law) and circumcision (Covenant) and yet had broken the Law. His point about Gentiles (physically uncircumcised) who fulfilled the Law **judging** Jews

(physically circumcised) who had broken the Law was yet another stinging rebuke to Jews.

How could that be? What logical explanation could Paul possibly present to support such an outrageous statement?

Verse 28

“For he is not a Jew who *is one* outwardly, nor *is* circumcision that which *is* outward in the flesh”

ου γαρ ο εν τω φανερω ιουδαιος εστιν ουδε η εν τω φανερω εν σαρκι περιτομη

ου γαρ ο εν (*ou gar ho en*) “not indeed the one on”

τω φανερω ιουδαιος εστιν (*tó phaneró ioudaios estin*) “the outward a Jew is”

ουδε η εν (*oude hé en*) “neither the one outwardly”

τω φανερω εν σαρκι περιτομη (*tó phaneró en sarki peritoué*) “the outward in flesh is circumcision”

Paul is introducing an amazing concept to Jews who depended on their outward appearance (e.g. circumcision). True circumcision is not that which is outward in the flesh. This is God’s logic.

Verse 29

“but *he is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise *is* not from men but from God.”

αλλ ο εν τω κρυπτω ιουδαιος και περιτομη καρδιας εν πνευματι ου γραμματι ου ο επαινος ουκ εξ ανθρωπων αλλ εκ του θεου

αλλ ο εν τω κρυπτω ιουδαιος (*all ho en tó kruptó ioudaios*) “but he that is on the inward a Jew” .. *kruptó* means “inward nature, hidden, secret”

και περιτομη καρδιας (*kai peritomé kardias*) “and circumcision is of heart”

εν πνευματι (*en pneumatí*) “in spirit”

ου γραμματι (*ou grammati*) “not in letter”

ου ο επαινος ουκ εξ ανθρωπων (*hou ho epainos ouk ex anthrópon*) “of whom the praise is not of men” .. *epainos* means “commendation, approval, praise”

αλλ εκ του θεου (*all ek tou theou*) “but of God”

Remember that Jews depended on their connection to God’s covenant with Abraham and the Law God gave Israel through Moses for their salvation. Paul has just destroyed their dependance as being wrong in God’s sight.

Being a Jew is inward, not outward. It is circumcision of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter. Praise is from God, not from men. God decides who receives His praise.

Here are more thoughts about the meaning of what Paul wrote in Romans 2 –

“And circumcision is that of the heart – That is, that circumcision which is acceptable to God. and which meets the design of the institution, is what is attended with holiness of heart; with the cutting off of sins; and with a pure life. The design of circumcision was to be a sign of separation from the pagan world, and of consecration to the holy God. And this design implied the renunciation and forsaking of all sins; or the cutting off of everything that was offensive to God. This was a work especially of the heart. This design was often stated and enforced in the writings of the Old Testament; Deuteronomy 10:16, ‘Circumcise, therefore, the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked;’ Jeremiah 4:4; Deuteronomy 30:6.” *Barnes’ Notes On The Bible*

“But he is a Jew which is one inwardly,.... Who has an internal work of grace upon his soul: who has not only an outward name, but an inward nature; not the law of God in the hand, but in the heart; not an external righteousness only, but internal holiness; and who is not a mere outward court worshipper, but a worshipper of God in Spirit and in truth.” *Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible*

“Which is one inwardly – Who has his heart purified, according to what God has uniformly prescribed by his prophets; see above: for circumcision is of the heart, in the spirit, εν πνευματι by the Spirit of God, who is the author of all spiritual affections and holy purposes: or, every thing here is to be understood spiritually, and not literally; for without holiness none can please God, and without holiness none can see him.”

Clarke's Commentary

“He is a right and true Jew, an Israelite indeed, that hath taken away the foreskin of his heart, Jeremiah 4:4; that is cleansed from all corrupt affections, and hath laid aside all superfluity of naughtiness; that worshippeth God in the Spirit, rejoiceth in Christ Jesus, and hath no confidence in the flesh. Such are the circumcision and Jews indeed: see Philippians 3:3.” *Matthew Poole's Commentary*

What Paul did in Romans 2 was to summarize what it meant to be a Jew. Any Jew of his day reading those words would have immediately understood the stinging rebuke.

Remember what Paul wrote the Christians in Philippi –

“If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. ” Philippians 3:4-6

The Apostle Paul had grown up depending on all of these 'fleshly' aspects of Judaism –

“But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.” Philippians 3:7-11

Paul was not an armchair academician. He was the real thing – a Jew whose confidence was no longer in his flesh, but in Christ Jesus his Lord.

Next Time

We have completed our study of Romans 2. Next time we will move to Romans 3 where Paul defends God's right to judge all of humanity.

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