

Romans 2:12-17

¹² For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law;

¹³ (For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.

¹⁴ For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves:

¹⁵ Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;)

¹⁶ In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.

¹⁷ Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God...

Overview of Principles:

The righteousness of God in His *wrath against sin* (Rom. 1:18)

The *unrighteousness of man* (Rom. 1:18-32).

Man's judgment is *hypocritical* (Rom. 2:1), and there *is* respect of persons. From Romans 2:3 we get the principle of *relative righteousness*.

The judgment of God is according to *truth*, and there is *no respect of persons*. God's judgment is according to man's *deeds* (Rom. 2:2, Rom. 2:6-11). This demonstrates the principle of *absolute righteousness*.

Romans 2:12

For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law...

Even without the special revelation of the Law of Moses, all men will perish in Adam:

1 Cor. 15:21-22

For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

Sin, as we will learn, was still imputed to man's account based upon the law of conscience.

Those who sinned *in* the Law will be judged *according* to the Law:

Galatians 3:10

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.

Deuteronomy 27:26

Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen.

Romans 2:13-15 is a parenthetical statement between verses 12 and 16, and which explains the judgment according to the Law, which is, *if a man do these things, he shall live*, and explains the law of conscience possessed by all men.

Romans 2:13

For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.

Leviticus 18:5

Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD.

James 2:10

For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.

This statement in Romans 2:13 is again a hypothetical one. Paul is not giving practical doctrine; the Holy Ghost through the Scripture is building a legal case, first indicting all of humanity with the charge of falling short of God's righteous standard, so that He might then present the only solution as salvation by grace through faith alone.

Paul is simply stating that if a man were to hypothetically perform the Law with absolute perfection, he then could be justified before God. This, however, as Romans will make clear, is not possible. Paul addresses this in Galatians 3:

Galatians 3:11-12

But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.

And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.

Romans 2:14-15

For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves:

Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another...

This verse demonstrates the law of conscience, for, though they have not the law, by naturally doing the things contained in the law, they are a law unto themselves, and their conscience bears witness.

This is the first law articulated in Romans. In being a legal document, one would expect Romans to cite certain laws. And in fact it does.

The Law of Conscience - Rom. 2:15

The Law of Moses - Rom. 2:17

The Law of Faith - Rom. 3:27

The Law of Sin and Death - Rom. 7:23, Rom. 5:12, Rom. 1:32

The Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ - Rom. 8:2

The *heart* is where understanding takes place:

Psalm 2:1-2

My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee;
So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding

Job 38:36

Who hath put wisdom in the inward parts? or who hath given understanding to the heart?

There are things we know naturally in our hearts that are right and wrong, and these testify of the works which the Law commands.

Our hearts, that is, the understanding that takes place in the form of conscience, bears witness of these standards of right and wrong in the form of *accusation* or *excusation*.

Man either accuses himself in what he does, or excuses himself in what he does. In his darkened understanding, he is often relegated to the standard of *relative righteousness*, where he compares himself to other men, in an attempt to further justify himself.

Romans 2:14 says, *For when* the gentiles which have not the law do by nature the things contained in the law... *for when* indicates that this is not always the case, but this only occurs to the extent to which that conscience pricks their hearts even through the veil of their darkened understanding.

We learned in Romans 1:21 that when humanity chose not to glorify God nor be thankful to God they became vain in their imaginations and their foolish hearts were darkened.

And so the gentiles, though given a witness, are able to even corrupt that, though all men are born with this conscience intact.

Romans 2:16

In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.

This verse is in actuality the second part of the statement made in verse 12. In order to read this statement without interruption, we will remove the parenthetical clause:

Romans 2:12,16

For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law;

In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.

In the day when God judges the secrets of men according to Paul's gospel, those who sinned without the law will perish without the law, and as many as sinned in the law will be judged by the law.

Thus the gentile who had not the law, and did not possess the righteousness of faith, will be judged according to their works by the knowledge of right and wrong which they inherently possessed in their conscience.

The Jew, who had the law, but who didn't possess the righteousness of faith, will be judged according to their works by the standard of the law.

This shows that all men of all time will be judged according to Paul's gospel, and relates to gentiles even prior to the giving of the law.

Why is it according to "Paul's gospel?" Paul's message in the scripture is unique in that it proclaims that there is no difference between Jew and gentile; for all have sinned. This was always true, but because of the covenants of promise made to Israel, was not always apparent, as God gave them special priority in times past.

In this age, as Israel is in a fallen state, and God is not operating according to those covenants of promise except through Jesus Christ as the singular seed of Abraham, *every other man* is concluded a sinner.

Galatians 3:22

But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.

Speaking of Israel, Romans 11:32 says,

Romans 11:32

For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.

It is also according to Paul's gospel in that, just as Romans 2 explains, it's not the *hearers* who are justified, but the *doers*. This means Paul's gospel begins with man being judged according to his works. This is a problem as Romans explains, because God's judgment, not being hypocritical or with respect of persons, and not being according to a standard of *relative righteousness*, but according to His standard of *absolute righteousness*, condemns all of mankind by their works.

We will later see that God is making an offer to man, to be justified without works, through faith alone.

Since unsaved men are going to be judged according to Paul's gospel, this means they will be judged according to their works (John 5:29, 2 Cor. 11:15, Rev. 20:12).

Romans 2:17

Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God...

Here Paul turns his attention to the Jew. The term *Jew* is specific and refers to the covenantal practice of religion held by the southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin, and doesn't even refer to all of Israel, seeing as there were Israelites who forsook the old covenant:

1 Kings 12:26-31

²⁶ And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David:

²⁷ If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah.

²⁸ Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.

²⁹ And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan.

³⁰ And this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan.

³¹ And he made an house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi.

This is why the Samaritan woman said in John 4:20,

Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.

Jesus says in response,

John 4:22

Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews.

Keep in mind that the Samaritan woman admitted that she was a descendant of Jacob. And so to be an Israelite was one thing, but to be a Jew was something else.

To be a Jew is to be yoked to the religion of the old covenant.

When Paul testified before King Agrippa in Acts 26, he says this:

Acts 26:4-5

My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews;

Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.

Galatians 1:13-14

For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it:

And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.

James also says in James 1,

James 1:25-27

²⁵ But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

²⁶ If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.

²⁷ Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

The word religion in scripture always pertains to the covenant given to Israel and the works it entails.

A proper understanding of what a Jew is as opposed to a bloodline Israelite is important, because one can be an Israelite and not be a Jew, and one can be a gentile and become a Jew, as Paul will point out.

And the Israelites, who went astray, could have at any time repented and come back to God, and again joined the covenant that was their birthright, because of the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the clauses in the Law of Moses providing mercy for them, based upon those promises.

This is why the old covenant system of religion became associated with the tribe of Judah, where we get the term *Jew* from—because they historically held on to the true form of the faith and practice.

And so when we're told that there is no Jew or gentile in the body of Christ, this is not simply indicating that there is no racial distinction, though that's also true; but what that is indicating is that there is no covenantal privilege at this present time, which the Jews, who were party to the Old Covenant with God, enjoyed in times past.

And so when Romans 2:17 says,

Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God...

He's speaking of their covenanted position with God, in their religion. Interesting to note that the Holy Spirit inspired the words, and *retest in the Law*, when the Law, by its very nature, was not something they were to "rest" in, but was something that demanded work.