

## Romans 2:17-2:29

- <sup>17</sup> Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God,  
<sup>18</sup> And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law;  
<sup>19</sup> And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness,  
<sup>20</sup> An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.  
<sup>21</sup> Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?  
<sup>22</sup> Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?  
<sup>23</sup> Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?  
<sup>24</sup> For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written.  
<sup>25</sup> For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision.  
<sup>26</sup> Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision?  
<sup>27</sup> And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law?  
<sup>28</sup> For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:  
<sup>29</sup> But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but 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*.

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

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; we saw the Samaritan woman, being a descendant of Jacob, and living in the area where the northern tribes lived, and where the lot of their inheritance was, was not identified as a Jewess; she knew not what she worshiped, for salvation was of the Jews (John 4:22).

Their confidence, being the covenanted people of God, was that they kept the pure form of the Mosaic covenant as it was commanded—that is not to say they kept it from the heart, but they did hold to the traditions as they were delivered to them through Moses, as opposed to the northern tribes, who departed Judaism.

Their boast should have been in God and God alone.

Psalm 34:1-2

I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth.

My soul shall make her boast in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad.

Jeremiah 9:23-24

Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches:

But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.

Paul quotes Jeremiah and drives this point home for the Church in 1 Corinthians 1:26-31:

For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:

But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.

But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

As we will see in Romans, “the gospel” is a package deal, and doesn’t end at justification, but includes redemption, that is, we are *purchased*; it includes *His righteousness* imputed to our account, so that we’re not simply forgiven but *made* the righteousness of God; it includes the wisdom of God imparted to us in the mind of Christ, by the illumination of the scriptures by the Holy Ghost; and it includes *practical sanctification*, how the gospel works in your everyday life—and all of this is provided as a free gift, so that Jesus Christ alone gets all the glory.

Israel's proper response should have been "to God alone be glory," especially if they stopped to consider their history of shortcomings and rebellion.

When we consider Israel's promises and future, we see that the only thread of hope they're hanging onto is God's character, God's righteousness, God's faithfulness, God's promise:

Ezekiel 36:22-24

Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went.

And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the LORD, saith the Lord GOD, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land.

Their entire future hope rests upon the faithfulness of God's promise and covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And so

Their boast should have been in God alone, because their history proved that, according to the flesh, they were abject failures, just as the gentiles.

This is why later Paul will write that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to all them which believe (Rom. 10:4)—because their works in their flesh according to the Law could not produce the righteousness of God that God's Holiness demanded for justification unto eternal life. The only times God counted anything for righteousness in the Old Testament it was according to the righteousness which was of faith (Abraham, Rahab, Phinehas).

Paul writes in Galatians 3:17,

And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.

What we see explained here in Romans however is that according to the Law, which they supposedly rested in, relied upon—*trusted in*—they were concluded sinners just like the gentiles. Paul will call the Old Covenant a ministration of death in 2 Corinthians 3, and in

Romans 7 will explain the functional death that occurs in the life of the believer when they place themselves under a work-based system.

Jesus alludes to the inability of the Law to produce God's righteousness in man in John 5:

John 5:39

Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.

Romans 2:18-20

<sup>18</sup> And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law;

<sup>19</sup> And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness,

<sup>20</sup> An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.

The nation of Israel was to know His will; the Lord Himself revealed aspects of His will to them.

This calls to mind the famous verse Deuteronomy 29:29,

The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.

He made known His plan of earthly redemption to them in the Law and the Prophets, namely, that they would inherit a land promised to them and their fathers forever (Genesis 13:14-17; Psalm 37:11); that they would be a nation of priests to minister God's Law to the nations (Ex. 19:6, Is. 61:6, Is. 66:21), that from them would come the Messiah Himself, and that in Him and His nation all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:3, 22:18).

As God's nation they were to *approve* the thing more excellent, those things which *excelled*, which *went beyond* mere conscience available to the gentiles, but which were revealed in the Divine Revelation of the Law of Moses.

The word *approve* carries with it more than just mental assent, but also means to prove, to show to be true, or to justify.

Approve comes from the Latin prefix *ad* which means "to" and the root *probare*, meaning to test; if you've proved something you've first tested it, you've shown it to be true and in doing so, have justified it to be so.

In carrying out God's commands, they were to demonstrate the righteousness and wisdom of the One True God.

2:19-22

<sup>19</sup> And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness,

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<sup>21</sup> Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?

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The nation of Israel, which God created for His purpose, was to be a guide to the blind, but failed to fully live up to that purpose;

We see it fulfilled however in the future kingdom of Christ:

Isaiah 2:2-3

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

They were to be a light to the gentiles, but history proved that impossible. When we look at prophecy regarding the phrase, *light to the gentiles*, what we see is they are all a reference to Christ alone:

Isaiah 42:6

I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles...

Isaiah 49:6

And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.

Simeon speaks to this in Luke 2:29-32,

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:  
For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,  
Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;  
A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

When Paul and Barnabas preach in the synagogue at Antioch Pisidia in Acts 13, Paul says,

Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.  
For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.

This is the first of the 3 “we turn to the gentiles” statements in Acts, a written record certifying Israel’s blindness, and Paul pulls from the prophecies to show over and over that the end goal in Israel’s salvation was that the gentile nations would be blessed through them; but in this age where Israel has rejected their Messiah, and is fallen, God, through the ministry of Paul according to the mystery of Christ, is sending salvation to the gentiles anyways.

Paul understands Israel’s fall, which he will explain in Romans 9-11, and that Christ alone is the light of the world, which is why he’s going to say in verse 24 the name of God is blasphemed among the nations wherever they went, because in breaking the Law they dishonored the very God they supposedly gloried in.

2:21-24

<sup>21</sup>Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?

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<sup>23</sup>Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?

The rhetorical answer to this is *no*, and yet that is not the case. Consider the 8 woes Jesus proclaimed against the religious Jews in Matthew 23, which we won’t look at for sake of time, but Jesus outright condemns them for their hypocrisy, and calls them blind guides and fools.

In being teachers of the Law, they should have been teaching themselves, and yet, they always found a way to circumvent the law to fulfill their own desires. We see this when they use the silver that was cast into the temple by Judas and used it to buy a field for burial, because it was not lawful to put into the treasury, because it was blood money—when they were the ones who conspired to commit murder!

<sup>24</sup>For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written.

Verse 24 is an allusion, not a direct quote, of Isaiah 52 and Ezekiel 36:



Isaiah 52:4-5

For thus saith the Lord God, My people went down aforetime into Egypt to sojourn there; and the Assyrian oppressed them without cause.

Now therefore, what have I here, saith the Lord, that my people is taken away for nought? they that rule over them make them to howl, saith the Lord; and my name continually every day is blasphemed.

Ezekiel 36:18-21

<sup>18</sup>Wherefore I poured my fury upon them for the blood that they had shed upon the land, and for their idols wherewith they had polluted it:

<sup>19</sup>And I scattered them among the heathen, and they were dispersed through the countries: according to their way and according to their doings I judged them.

<sup>20</sup>And when they entered unto the heathen, whither they went, they profaned my holy name, when they said to them, These are the people of the Lord, and are gone forth out of his land.

<sup>21</sup>But I had pity for mine holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen, whither they went.

<sup>25</sup>For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision.

<sup>26</sup>Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision?

<sup>27</sup>And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law?

<sup>28</sup>For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:

<sup>29</sup>But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

We've already discussed the term *Jew*, that it does not refer to any Israelite necessarily; but refers to the practice of the religion of the Old Covenant. We will see this will be the case too in the future with the new covenant.

Ezekiel 47:21-22

So shall ye divide this land unto you according to the tribes of Israel.

And it shall come to pass, that ye shall divide it by lot for an inheritance unto you, and to the strangers that sojourn among you, which shall beget children among you: and they shall be unto

you as born in the country among the children of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel.

Famous examples of proselytes are Ruth converting to Judaism; we see the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 is a proselyte to Judaism.

What Paul is saying here is that the heart behind the individual is what mattered, and he will explain later that they must have the faith of their father Abraham for circumcision to mean anything at all.

Paul is not explaining to the church that we are to become spiritual Jews. We are not bound to the old covenant, we are not part of any religious order, we are not bound by carnal ordinances.

In the Body of Christ there is no Jew nor Greek (Gal. 3:28), and neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything (Gal. 5:6, Gal. 6:15).

Therefore we are part of something entirely unique and different, a new creature. Paul is simply explaining the vanity of the outward observance of religious rituals even as a covenanted Jew, when the heart is devoid of faith in God—the very thing that the patriarchs of Israel had.