

*Center for Global Ministries*

*Romans Study Guide*

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Romans 2: Condemnation of Moralists  
and Jews

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## Chapter 2 Condemnation of Jews and morally upright

Fortunately not all of humanity fell into the gross immorality and abandonment of God as those in the later part of Romans 1. What about the Jews and morally upright who feel disdain for such corruption? Many believed that they were the exception to such pagan practices and that by complying with certain religious standards, especially by keeping the Mosaic law and rabbinical traditions they would gain God's favor and earn eternal life. They were convinced that God would judge the idolatry and immorality of the pagan Gentiles but that no Jew would ever face such condemnation, even if he were and unbeliever. Some who profess to be Christians may be trusting in their baptism, church membership or being part of a Christian family, partaking of the sacraments, high moral standards, or hold to orthodox doctrines just to gain favor with God and eternal life.

However, the only hope for any person is to confess to his total unworthiness, guilt and just condemnation before God, as one who is totally unable to measure up to God's standards of righteousness. There are no exceptions. God does not measure the "good" deeds of a person against his "bad" deeds to determine his worthiness. On such a scale, any "bad" deed of disobedience would weigh tons, while the total "good" deeds of a life time may total to ounces. The deception of self-contentment with one's goodness deceives many into a false hope that they are not condemned already.

### I. Six Principles that will condemn the self-righteous person (2:1-16)

The moralist believe that they live on a different moral plane than do the pagan world around them, whom they are quick to condemn, especially to show their own superiority. Now Paul will show that they are equally as guilty often of the same things for which they judge others.

#### 1. Knowledge (2:1)

<sup>NET</sup> **Rom 2:1** Therefore you are **without excuse**, whoever you are, when you **judge** someone else. For on **whatever grounds** you judge another, you **condemn yourself**, because you who judge **practice the same things**.

**2:1 The connective "therefore"** seeks to conclude what was mentioned in chapter 1. The "you" probably refers to the moralist Gentile or Jew. The primary symptom of the legalistic spirit of self-righteousness is a judgmental spirit (e.g., Jews judging Gentiles). Many feel good about themselves because they have not sunk to the depths of moral depravity as Paul described in chapter 1. "**Whatever grounds**" refers broadly to either attempting to follow the Law, his man-made rules of conduct or his conscience (2:15) as best he could. God reveals that no one can be consistent even to this lower standard, much less to God's law. When a person judges another, he thinks that his standard of right and wrong, which he strives to follow, makes him superior and supposedly more acceptable. For the Jews it is worse because they knew of the true standard of God in the Law, but continued to pretend to be obeying it. The self-righteous make two mistakes: (1) they humanize or minimize God's standard of righteousness;<sup>1</sup> (2) they underestimate the amount and gravity of their own sins. How did some in Jesus' day exaggerate the faults of others and minimize their own sins in Matt 7:1-3?

<sup>1</sup> Jesus taught the importance of the inner life of the believer as well as the behavior. If you hate someone, Jesus taught that this was the equivalent of murder; if you have lust for someone not your spouse, it is seen as adultery.

## 2. Truth (2:2-3)

<sup>2</sup> Now we know that God's judgment is **in accordance** with truth against those who **practice** such things.

<sup>3</sup> And do you **think**, whoever you are, when you judge those who practice such things and yet **do them yourself**, that you will **escape God's judgment**?

**2:2 The switch from “you” to “we”** means the subject is now the Jews (as Paul was a Jew) instead of the generic moralist (2:1). Since the Jews had been given the “oracles of God” (Rom 3:2) they “**know**” (*oida*, perfect tense: completed action with continual result, lit. “have known” – “to perceive with the eyes, discover, observe”), that is, this refers to common knowledge known by all Jews. “God” is described 163 times in Romans. Here He his judgment is based on “truth.” This describes God’s character in which we can trust. How does the Psalmist describe the judgment of God?

Ps 9:4, 8

Ps 96:13

Ps 145:17

- God always judges on the basis of the “**truth**” (*aletheia*, “what has certainty and validity”) because this is His nature. The character of God must be established firmly in the mind and heart of every believer in order to trust His words and truths. “As for the Rock, His work is *perfect* [LXX *aletheia*], for all his ways are just. He is a reliable God who is never unjust, he is fair and upright” (Deut 32:4). What is the basis of His evaluations in 1 Sam 16:7?
- Paul is warning against man’s tendency to trust in their own judgment of themselves, instead of what God has revealed about His judgment. He not only will judge those who practice “such things” (as described in chapter 1), but also those who secretly or inwardly do the same things. Secret sinners think they are better than overt sinners, but God sees them equally as evil. How does this verse describe the “truth” of God’s judgments?  
Heb 4:13

**2:3 “Whoever you are” refers either to the Gentile moralist or the Jewish reader.** Paul is analyzing the judgment of the moralist who “**think**” (*logizomai*, present tense: “continually or habitually...” – “to calculate, count on”) they are better; they erroneously calculate their guilt. The hypocritical legalist critic of others believes that if they are better than some others they will not be judged, or that God’s judgment is only against the “really bad sinners.” The truth is that every sin is horrendously repulsive to our holy God. Notice how Jesus described his legalistic religious listeners in Matt 23:27 and their inescapable end (23:33).

See Luke 18:9

## 3. Guilt (2:4-5)

<sup>4</sup> Or do you have **contempt** for the **wealth of his kindness, forbearance, and patience**, and yet do not know that **God's kindness leads you to repentance**?

<sup>5</sup> But because of **your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart**, you are **storing up wrath** for yourselves in the day of wrath, when God's **righteous judgment is revealed!**

**2:4 The more critical of others and less honesty about personal guilt that a person is**, the more guilt is being accumulated for the eventual judgment. To “**have contempt**” (*kataphroneo*, present tense: “continually or habitually...” – “to think little or nothing of, treat with neglect or disregard, of little value”) has the idea of the lack of appreciation or the presumption of benefits (or worse, the sense of being worth the benefits). When the moralist thinks he is worthy of these benefits he becomes presumption and continually expects more. Though every person to different degrees has experienced the “**kindness** [the universal benefits **God gives**], **forbearance** [the judgment withheld] **and patience** [the duration of both]” of God, most do not appreciate God as being good to them. The tendency is to be critical of God and distrusting in His character because of their problems. God waited 800 years (BC 1400 [Moses] to BC 600 [Babylonian Captivity]) for Israel and Judah to repent before bringing judgment down on the nation. The fact that we think we deserve better from God reveals how deceived we are about our own goodness. Instead of creating a thankful heart (Rom 1:21) and a trusting spirit they continued to trust in their own goodness (Luke 18:9) and resources (Mark 10:24). God’s goodness should lead a person to “**repentance**” (*metanoia*, “change of mind of those who begun to abhor their errors and misdeeds...recognition of sin and sorrow for it,” THAYER). The classic verse for repentance is 1 Thess 1:9. What changed in this repentance?

**2:5 Those who refuse to see God’s providence as reason to trust Him alone** reveal their own “**stubbornness**” (*skleroteta*, “obstinacy, hardness” or “refusing to think differently,” LOUW-NIDA) and unrepentant hearts. Nebuchadnezzar’s judgment came “when his **mind** [*lebab*, “heart”], and his **spirit** [*ruwach*, “seat of the mind”] became so proud the he behaved arrogantly, he was disposed from his royal throne” (Dan 5:20). This is what most grieves the heart of God: “after looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart...” He healed a man knowing it would provoke the Pharisees’ resistance to him, instead of their repentance (Mark 3:6-7). The writer to Hebrews warned three times not to harden their hearts by refusing to listen to God’s revelation (Heb 3:8, 15; 4:7). Indeed, the most offensive sin is the refusal of God’s gracious forgiveness for our sinfulness because of the idea that we are good enough and don’t need to change. One’s sins are being “**stored up**” (*thesaurizo*, present tense: “continually...” - “heap up, accumulate riches, keep in store”) to which we are accountable. What do these verses suggest we are accountable for?

Matt 12:36

Luke 16:2

Rom 14:12

Heb 13:17

- Either by presuming on His kindness, ignoring His gracious offers and promises, or failing to perceive His love only bring a more severe judgment, which will surely come. The “**day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God**” refer to the great white throne judgment when all the unsaved of world history as well as Satan and his angels will stand before the throne to receive their eternal destinies (Rev 20:10-15). Many people think that God’s wrath is merely a metaphor for chastisement, but not eternal damnation in separation from God forever. Any sin unresolved and unredeemed is just cause for eternal condemnation. God told Adam, “... in the day that you eat from it [tree of the knowledge of good and evil] you shall surely die” (Gen 2:16-17). In other words, from the beginning all sin was a capital offense. Every day we should thank the Lord that He has been so patient and kind toward us for taking our punishment on the cross. Only His daily mercy prevents another Ananias-Sapphira incident in thousands of lives (Acts 5). How severe are the examples of God’s judgment in 1 Cor 10:1-11?

- The reference to the “day of wrath” if isolated for other passages appears to present a single general judgment of all mankind. The Scriptures, however, describe several different judgments at different times. For example, the Judgment of Israel at the Second Advent of Christ at the end of the Tribulation period (Ezek 20:32-38), the Judgment of Gentiles at Christ’s Advent (Matt 25:31-46); the Seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10); and the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev 20:11-15). The emphasis here is on the fact that God will judge all peoples, whether Jew or Gentile, on an equal basis.

#### 4. Deeds (2:6-10)

Paul continues with the topic of the righteous judgment of God (v. 5). How do these following verses describe this great day?

2 Peter 3:6-7

2 Tim 4:1

2 Thes 1:7-8

Rev 20:11-15

<sup>6</sup> He will **reward** each one according to his **works**:

<sup>7</sup> eternal life to those who by **perseverance in good works** seek glory and honor and immortality,

<sup>8</sup> but **wrath and anger** to those who live in **selfish ambition** and **do not obey** the truth but **follow** unrighteousness.

<sup>9</sup> There will be **affliction and distress** on everyone who does evil, on the Jew first and also the Greek,

<sup>10</sup> but **glory and honor and peace** for everyone who does **good**, for the Jew first and also the Greek.

**2:6 Men will be judged according to their works in this judgment.** Though there are two judgments, Judgment Seat of Christ (for believers) and the Great White Throne (for unsaved), they both are based on works (1 Cor 3:8). What do these verses teach about these judgments?

Prov 24:12

2 Cor 5:10

Rom 14:12

- What is the test of a man’s character according to Matt 7:16, 20?
- A distinction is clearly made in Scriptures: the final judgment of the value of one’s life is on the basis of works, but nowhere is the teaching of a salvation by works. Where do good works play if salvation is by faith? Outward godly deeds give evidence that there is a new life within. What does Eph 2:10 teach concerning why we were “created in Christ Jesus?”
- We had nothing to do with how we were saved, since God did it all, so the only evaluation He can give us is what we did after we became a believer. For this, whatever it may be, He wants to “**reward**” us (*apodidomi*, “give back, return, recompense”). These judgments will bring ultimate justice to life’s experiences. Salvation is not discussed until chapter 3 in Romans, but where genuine salvation is born in a believer then good deeds will follow. However, where there is no change of life or no good deeds uncovers the fact that the new life is not present. It is much like a new born baby: if it immediately begins to cry and kick and move, one justly suspects that the baby is alive. If there is no movement or noise then one suspects the absence of life. The movements and crying do not give the life, only indicate its presence. Notice in the following verses that there are two kinds of rewards:

2 Tim 4:14

1 Cor 9:17

**2:7 A person's habitual behavior determines the condition of their heart.** A person who with "**perseverance**" (*hupomone*, "steadfastness, constancy, endurance") "**seek**" (*zeteo*, present tense: continually or keeps on..." – "strive, aim at, crave") "glory, honor and immortality."

- Thus the first symptom of one who is genuinely saved wants God to be **glorified** in his life (1 Cor 10:31) and to **share in His glory** some day when salvation is completed in His presence. We know that the present "momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison" (2 Cor 4:17) and one day "when Christ, who is our life, is revealed then [we] also will be revealed with him in glory" (Col 3:4). This is the glory sought, not some earthly, fleshly, passing glory.
- The second symptom is seeking **honor**, not the egotistical, self-promotional honor of this world, but the honor that he will receive from the King of Kings (Matt 25:21). How did Jesus describe this worthy goal in John 12:26?
- The third symptom is the desire for immortality in the day when this decaying body "must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality" (1 Cor 15:53). It is not the quest for an immortal life, but for the preparation for the life in eternity. How is immortality brought to man in 2 Tim 1:10?

**2:8-9 The evidence of those who do not belong to God** is seen in their evil characteristics (v. 7) and their consequences (v. 8).

- First evidence of the unsaved is "**selfishly ambitious**" (*epitheias*, "a desire to put one's self forward, self-interest, rivalry;" "who electioneer for office, courting popular applause by trickery, work for hire," THAYER). This word is used in James 3:14-15 so notice the implications.
- Second evidence of the unsaved is they "**do not obey** the truth" (*apeitheo*, present tense: "continually or keep on..." – "be disobedient, refusal to comply with authority, disbelieving," GINGRICH). This was a characteristic of unbelieving Israel (Rom 10:21). Notice how this term is used of unbelievers who have not obtained mercy in Rom 11:30.
- Third evidence is that they "**follow**" (*peitho*, present passive: "continually done to them" - "be persuade by, be satisfied with, be induced to believe or trust in," THAYER). They are dominated by "**unrighteousness**" with the consequences of "indignation" (*thumos*, "anger, heat, anger boiling up") and "**wrath**" (*orge*, "anger, violent emotion, anger of punishment"). The later is the strongest kind of anger, as when God's grace is completely exhausted, the end of God's patience and tolerance.
- V. 9 - Consequently for the unbeliever there will be "**tribulation**" (*thlipsis*, "extreme pressure and anguish") and "**distress**" (*stenochoria*, "narrowest of place," metaphorically, "extreme affliction, calamity, confinement"). Solitary confinement is supposed to be the worst form of punishment and the worst part about hell is the isolation in darkness forever.
- The phrase "**the Jew first and also the Greek**" which appears twice in the passage. The first use refers to those who are condemned by God. The idea that a Jew could be

lost was so far from their thinking that this passage must have sounded strange. In Amos 3:2<sup>NET</sup> God told Israel, “I only have chosen you alone from all the clans of the earth,” but he quickly added, “therefore, I will punish you for all your sins.” Israel is first in punishment because she has been given more of God’s revelations.

**2:10 Anyone who “does good”** (present tense: “continually or keeps on doing...”) will receive “**glory, honor and peace.**” This is not salvation but the practical benefit of wise living. The habitual behavior of a person always reveals the condition of his heart. Eternal life is not the reward for good living, but God always honors wise living according to Proverbs. God grants this benefit in life regardless whether one is a Jew or Gentile.

## 5. Impartiality (2:11-15)

<sup>11</sup> For there is **no partiality** with God.

<sup>12</sup> For all who have sinned **apart from** the law will also **perish apart from** the law, and all who have sinned **under** the law will be judged **by** the law.

<sup>13</sup> For it is not those who **hear** the law who are righteous before God, but those **who do the law** will be declared righteous.

<sup>14</sup> For whenever the Gentiles, who do not have the law, **do by nature** the things **required by the law**, these who do not have the law are **a law to themselves.**

<sup>15</sup> They **show** that the work of the law is **written in their hearts**, as their **conscience** bears witness and their **conflicting thoughts accuse or else defend them,**

**2:11 There are no special people with automatic privileges** for acceptance before God, that is there is “no **partiality**” with God (*prosopolepsia*, “respect of persons, respect for the outward circumstances of man and not their intrinsic merits, favoritism”). Such things as position, fame, fortune, education, popularity, race or appearance have no influence with God. What more can you learn from these verses about God’s impartiality?

Acts 10:34 (Note: this was 10 years after the Ascension)

Eph 6:9

Col 3:25

1 Pet 1:17

**2:12 God’s impartiality considers the amount of biblical understanding** everyone has received. Those who sinned without knowing the Law, will be judged on another basis: conscience (2:15) and awareness from creation (1:20) – which has always be a vast majority of the world population. The word “**perish**” (*apollumi*, future tense: “to put an end to, be lost”) means something that is ruined and no longer usable for its intended purpose. This is the term used for those who are thrown into hell (Matt 10:28), but not annihilation (used of the living “lost” in Israel – Matt 10:6). Those entrusted with the Law and the “oracles of God” (3:2) will be judged according to the light received, which now would include the NT. Both groups are equally accountable to God for a perfect life and nothing less is acceptable (Rom 10:5).

**2:13 It is not enough to be a “hearer”** (*akroates*, “disciple, auditor”) **the law if you are going to trust in** your obedience to every word of the Law, then it will be required to do all the law all the time without a single failure. The greater the “hearing” of the Law, the greater the accountability to obey and thus the greater the judgment will be. Some might deceive themselves into thinking they are saved just because they go to church regularly to “hear” the Bible taught, as the Jews might have thought there was value in hearing God’s Word read to them. James gave the same message to his readers (1:22-25). The point is that a person with a shallow knowledge of God’s Word either does not want to learn what he is expected to obey or he only wants enough of God to have “good luck,” that is, he is using

the Bible as a way to manipulate God. Any failure to obey what is heard from God's Word indicates a distrust or disbelief in what God recorded. Read the James passage and compare the two verses.

- The phrase "those who do the law will be declared righteous" is the standard of the Law, which demands perfect and continuous obedience. The only way to be declared righteous under the Law would be to keep every command without a failure ever. However, the NT reveals that no one has or can ever be justified by keeping the law. This principle reveals that no Jew or Gentile can ever gain justification by obedience. Compare these verses with this principle to determine Paul's purpose here:

Acts 13:39

Rom 3:20

Gal 2:16

Gal 2:21

Gal 3:11

**2:14-15 What about the Gentiles?** Are they excluded from any hope of justification or eternal judgment since they do not have the law? Paul already revealed that the Gentiles, though they do not have the Law, have the ability to perceive the existence of a Designer-Creator-God and they have an innate knowledge of right and wrong (conscience) (Rom 1:18-24 ff.). Generally all cultures agree with most of the Ten Commandments (possible exception of the Sabbath keeping - 4<sup>th</sup> commandment, which is more ceremonial than moral). In God's sight there are four reasons the heathen are lost:

1. Their rejection of the knowledge of God through the circumstantial Designer evidence of creation condemns them (1:18-20)
  2. Their inability to obey the "Law written in their hearts" (v. 15) condemns them. Most standards of ethics from tribal to civilization are similar to the Ten Commandments. Many are the good deeds done by Gentiles, but if they thought they were doing good to off-set their bad, then they show their lostness.
  3. Their inability to perfectly follow their own conscience (v. 15) which "**bears witness**" (*summartureo*, present tense: "continually or keeps on..." – "bears a joint witness, adds testimony in support, agrees with) to the fact that they are guilty. Though subjective and varied due to their knowledge of God's Word to how responsive the culture and individual has been to following their conscience. The more their conscience is ignored, it becomes insensitive and eventually there are no moral limits as happens to apostates (1 Tim 4:2).
  4. Their conscious reasoning (probably provoked by their conscience) or "conflicting thoughts accuse or else defend them" (v. 15). They have the innate ability to know when they do right or wrong. Most religions and Animism live in fear because they know they have violated at some time one or more of their cultural moors.
- There is no doubt that all the Gentiles are guilty before God, if for no other reason than their conscience shows them their guilt as a God designed faculty to point them to seek for an answer. If they would seek Him out, God would move a faithful witness at the right time and right place to share the truth of the gospel to them. The following three verses give hope:  
John 7:17  
Acts 17:26-27  
Jer 29:13

- The conscience, however, is not infallible and is has flaws. The following verses give a coverage of the general biblical concepts of the conscience. Discuss these verses:
  - “Good” conscience: Acts 23:1; 1 Tim 1:5, 19
  - “Clear” conscience: Acts 24:16; 1 Tim 3:9; 2 Tim 1:3; Heb 13:18
  - “Guilty” conscience: Heb 10:22
  - “Corrupted” conscience: Titus 1:15
  - “Weak” conscience: 1 Cor 8:7, 10, 12
  - “Seared” conscience: 1 Tim 4:2
  - “Cleansed” conscience (if people trust in the blood of Christ): Heb 9:14

## 6. Motive (2:16)

<sup>16</sup> on the day when God will judge the **secrets of human hearts**, according to my gospel through Christ Jesus.

**2:16 The motive behind understanding the true status of all men** is that everyone is accountable to the Creator-God for their sins, however many of them they are aware of. People can live in denial of their guilt as a technique for handling it, but everyone will face the God who knows everything about every mind, heart, thought or ambition. “The human mind is more deceitful than anything else. It is incurably bad. Who can understand it?” (Jer 17:9<sup>NET</sup>). If our own mind and heart deceive us, we must rely on external truth or reality because we will one day face a reality we know is coming and we won’t be able to hide behind our ignorance. He will examine the “**secrets**” (*kruptos*, “hidden, concealed”) of “**human hearts**” (*anthropos*, “human being”) according to “**my gospel**” (Rom 16:25). This refers to the apostolic authority and clarity of the gospel that Jesus taught him (Gal 1:16- it did not come from other apostles; Gal 1:20 – Paul was not lying about his message; that is, he is relating what he heard from Jesus as he stated in 1 Cor 11:23, “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you...”). What to these texts teach about God’s ability to judge accurately?

1 Chron 28:9

Ps 139:1-3

Jer 17:10

Matt 6:4, 6, 18

## II. Condemned because of their hypocrisy (2:17-24)

More than half the people of the world believe there is a continual existence beyond the grave and optimistically hope that either it will soon end to their existence or they will enter into an impersonal, empty nothingness where there is no feeling or pain. Of those that hold to a theistic God concept there is a scary thought that God will judge their sin but they hope to get by somehow. One thing is certain for everyone who has ever lived: they will only die once, “and after this comes judgment” (Heb 9:27). This judgment will immediately determine whether a person already possesses eternal life or whether they died lost without God at all. This judgment will determine the state in which they will remain for eternity. Anyone who does not believe in Christ in this lifetime will be separated from Him forever with all those who did not want Him in their lives. God will give them their desire forever! The Christian is called to warn the world of the finality of their decisions during this life and offer them the truth that God has revealed to us in His amazing plan.

Paul has shown the moralist, both Jew and Gentile, that everyone will be brought before God’s judgment seat where their true thoughts and intents will be exposed leaving them with no basis for self-confidence in their goodness or religiosity (Rom 2:1-16). Now Paul

focuses specifically on the Jews who had much more knowledge and privileges, which only made them more accountable to God, not less (as they hoped).

### A. Eight Areas of Jewish Pride

- <sup>17</sup> But if you call yourself a Jew and **rely** on the law and **boast** of your relationship to God  
<sup>18</sup> and **know** his will and **approve** the superior things because you **receive** instruction from the law,  
<sup>19</sup> and if you are **convinced** that you yourself are a **guide to the blind**, a **light** to those who are in darkness,  
<sup>20</sup> an **educator** of the senseless, a **teacher** of little children, because you have in the law the **essential features of knowledge and of the truth**—  
<sup>21a</sup> therefore you who **teach** someone else, do you not teach yourself? ...

**2:17-21 These verses are directly addressed to the Jews.** Though an “if” clause<sup>2</sup> it should be translated “since...you call yourself a Jew...” After identifying his readers, now he will describe a list of **eight moral and religious characteristics** in which the Jews prided themselves to boast of their superiority over Gentiles (all of which are part of the “if” clause (vv. 17-21). Before explaining God’s plan for saving sinners, Paul destroys the idea of false spiritual security that most Jews held. How many religious people are going to be shocked to discover in the judgment that they had never been saved according to Matt 7:22-23?

1. Jews “**relied on the Law**” as a historical privilege, which they commonly interpreted as the assumption that they were the exception to the rule. How easy would it be to come to this conclusion according to Ps 147:19-20? Do Protestants fall into this same trap?
2. Jews “**boast about their relationship to God**,” but they did not know Him, in fact they dishonored Him. How did they dishonor God in 2:23-24?
3. Jews “**know His will**,” at least they were aware of His desires and plans. Some actually taught that since it was impossible to obey all the laws all the time, God only expected that we learn the facts of the Law was sufficient to please God. Some taught that since they possessed the Scriptural texts and revered them was all God expected. How did Jesus show that this attitude of biblical privilege was insufficient for eternal life in John 5:39-40?
4. Jews “**approved of**” what is superior (*dokimazo*, present tense: “keep on...” – “to test, examine, scrutinize (to see whether a thing is genuine or not, as metals). They had a prideful sense of spiritual superior standards. Jesus used this word to show how they missed the purpose of this skill: “You hypocrites! You know how to interpret (*dokimazo*) the appearance of the earth and the sky, but how can you not know how to interpret the present time? And why don’t you judge for yourselves what is right?” (Luke 12:56-57). This is a good attribute, even for Christians (Phil 1:10), but if it can become a basis of self-pride. What should they, and everyone today, be judging in 2 Cor 13:5?
5. Jews were “**instructed by the Law**” (*katecheo*, “present tense: “keep on...”-“to teach orally”) in their catechetical lessons in the synagogues. The concept is to teach by repetition and memorization both at home and in the synagogues. Jewish men were systematically and thoroughly taught the law and their interpretation of the laws. Many would memorize large portions of the OT and proudly recite as a public demonstration of their godliness. Many equated wisdom and religious piety with knowledge of the Scriptures, with less motivation on how practice the precepts. They prided themselves in that they knew the facts, instead of how much they obeyed.

<sup>2</sup> In Greek a conditional if-clause followed by a present tense verb (instead of a subjunctive verb) is assumed to be true.

Examine how this issue was the problem with the Jewish teacher Apollos (Acts 18:24-26) and how Aquila and Priscilla corrected him?

6. Jews were “**convinced**” (*peitho*, perfect tense: completed action in the past, “have...” – “to seek to persuade, believe”) of four ways they were superior to Gentiles. They considered themselves (a) a “guide for the blind,” yet Jesus called them “blind guides of the blind” (Matt 23:24-28), (b) “a light for those who are in the dark,” which was their duty (Isa 42:6) as Jesus taught them to be a witness to the rest of the world (Matt 5:14-16), (c) “an **instructor** (*paideutes*, “one who disciplines and corrects children”) of the foolish,” especially the Gentiles, as a condescending prideful attitude. A leader and teacher in Israel, Nicodemus did not understand the basics of salvation when Jesus told him of the new birth (John 3:7-11), (d) “a teacher of **little children**” (*nepios*, “minor, not of age”), a reference to Gentile proselytes to Judaism, who require childlike instruction in God’s law and the avoidance of pagan ideas they had learned. How did Paul see himself in 1 Tim 2:7?
7. Jews rested in “the Law the **essential features** (*morphosis*, “shape, form, embodiment, outline”) of knowledge,” that is, the “appearance” of knowledge, but a counterfeit knowledge. How does Paul use this term in 2 Tim 3:5 concerning the teachings of the last days?
8. Jews “who teach others, Do you not teach yourself?” Even when they taught the truth they taught it hypocritically, pretending that they were in compliance and righteous. When taught properly, it is a humbling experience to describe the law, especially the Ten Commandments, because no one can obey them perfectly. How did the Psalmist warn those who presumed to teach God’s Word in Ps 50:16-20? What did James warn teachers in James 3:1?

### B. Three areas of their spiritual and moral hypocrisy:

<sup>21b</sup> ... You who **preach** against **stealing**, do you steal?

<sup>22</sup> You who tell others not to commit **adultery**, do you commit adultery? You who abhor **idols**, do you rob temples?

<sup>23</sup> You who **boast** in the law **dishonor God** by transgressing the law!

<sup>24</sup> For just as it is written, “the name of God is being **blasphemed** among the Gentiles because of you.”

**2:21b The purpose of the law was to humble the sinner** to admit that he had failed God and needed His forgiveness, but the Jews refused to be humbled even though their disobedience was common knowledge. **The first area of hypocrisy related to the eighth commandment:** stealing. The prophets in the OT often described theft (Isa 56:11), bribery for profits (Ezek 22:12), false scales when money was weighted for value (Amos 8:5), withholding tithes as stealing from God (Mal 3:8-9). Jesus got angry with the money-exchangers calling them a “robbers’ den” (Matt 21:13) and the Pharisees because they “devour widows’ houses” (Matt 23:14) pretending to serve the Lord. They were guilty but refused to admit that they did anything wrong. If 1 John is written to know either whether you are lost or if you are truly saved, what is the symptom of the lost in 1:8 and what is the symptom of the saved in 1:9?

### **2:22a The second area of hypocrisy related to the seventh commandment: adultery.**

They were practicing adultery by arbitrarily divorcing their wife and marrying another woman to whom they momentarily were attracted. Jesus taught that divorce, except when infidelity was involved, results in adultery (Matt 5:32; 19:9). Furthermore, adultery can be committed without the physical act through lust (Matt 5:28), which is far more common. Can anyone be consistently innocent of this command?

**2:22b The third area of hypocrisy related to the second commandment: idols and sacrilege:**

“You who **abhor** idols” (*bdelusso*, present tense: “keep on...”-“to render foul, cause to be abhorred, turn one’s self away from on account of the stench”), “do you rob temples?” Originally the Jewish nation fell into idolatry for centuries until the two captivities of Israel (BC 722) and Judah (BC 586). While in exile the Jews were cured forever from idolatry, until they despised any resemblance of idols, even the use of Roman coins with the embossed image of emperors. What is meant by “rob temples” is uncertain. When Paul and his team were accused in Ephesus of disrupting their cultural religion the town clerk clarified that they were not “temple robbers” (Acts 19:37). This suggests that the crime was unknown for Jews despite the prohibition in the law to ever take any offerings left at pagan shrines (Deut 7:25). The Jews probably thought they were doing God a favor by defacing or stealing from a pagan shrine, but Paul calls it hypocrisy, that is, more for money than for religion.

**2:23-24 Boasting in the law yet dishonoring God by disobedience.** Every sin dishonors God. Against whom is sin always committed according to Ps 51:4?

- If the Jews caused the name of God to be “**blasphemed**” (*blasphemeo*, present tense: “keep on...” – “to speak reproachfully, be evil spoken of”) how much more when a Christian sins? Everything is discredited because of one sinner. Sometimes it would be better for some Christians to keep their Christianity a secret for the cause of Christ! Often the attitude of the world against the Jews was reflective of the contempt the Jews had for the world. Could the same thing that happened to the Jews in Isa 52:5 occur among the Gentile Christians today?

**III. Condemned because of trust in religious rites (2:25-29)**

It is natural that sinful man trust in any religious rite to make him acceptable to God. Circumcision refers to only male circumcision, which was given to Abraham to mark his descendants in Gen 17:10-14. It is a surgical operation of cutting away the foreskin of the male organ, perhaps as a symbol of the sinfulness of man, which needed removal, was passed on from generation to generation through procreation. The symbol of the need for the removal of sin was the sign of being a Jew. But it was only a sign. It did not remove any sin.

<sup>25</sup> For circumcision **has its value** if you practice the law, but if you **break** the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.

<sup>26</sup> Therefore **if** the uncircumcised man **obeys** the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision **be regarded** as circumcision?

<sup>27</sup> And will not the physically uncircumcised man who keeps the law **judge you** who, despite the **written code** and circumcision, transgress the law?

<sup>28</sup> For a person is not a Jew who is one **outwardly**, nor is circumcision something that is outward in the flesh,

<sup>29</sup> but **someone is a Jew** who is one **inwardly**, and **circumcision is of the heart** by the Spirit and **not by the written code**. This person's **praise** is not from people but **from God**.

**2:25 The value of circumcision was only if you practice the law perfectly.** The early Judaizers wanted all male Christians to be circumcised and follow the Mosaic law to be saved. What is the obligation of everyone who receives circumcision according to Gal 5:3?

- Without perfect obedience a Jew is just like any other sinner, in need of a Savior. This contradicted many Jewish Midrash teachings that “No circumcised Jewish man

will see hell.” Stephen called the unbelieving Jews in Acts 7:51, “You stubborn people with **uncircumcised in heart and ears!**” That meant they were like the unsaved Gentiles – no worse statement could be made against the Jews. Paul states that “if you **break** the law,” then your circumcision is valueless: you no longer have a sign of the covenant that means anything. Since no one can keep the law, it is worthless to trust in circumcision.

**2:26-27 The opposite is shockingly true as well**, that is, hypothetically, if the uncircumcised Gentile is obedient to the “righteous requirements of the law” he could “**be counted** for circumcision” (*logizomai*, “credited for”). The lack of circumcision would not condemn a Gentile, just as having received circumcision will not save a Jew. The key is perfect obedience to the law. In either case, perfect obedience could result in justification regardless of circumcision, and the consequence of breaking the law is not avoided by circumcision. How did Paul describe the unsaved and disobedient Jews who rejected the gospel of grace in Phil 3:2?

- Paul states the perfectly obedient uncircumcised Gentile “will he not judge” the Jews who are transgressors, as a hyperbole, since no Gentile or Jew could obey the law perfectly and the prerogative of judging Israel is only in God’s hands. He is making the point by exaggerating the logic that only perfect obedience by anyone makes them acceptable to God. Anything less is sin and thrusts everyone alike into the desperate need of a Savior.

**2:28 Two-part definition of a true Jew:** (1) “**For a person is not a Jew, which is one outwardly.**” This first statement annuls most of the Jewish thinking of Paul’s day. Later he rephrased it, “For not all those who are descended from Israel are truly Israel” (Rom 9:6<sup>NET</sup>). Sometimes we use “Christian” in a similar manner: “Not all who claim to be Christians are truly Christian.” Here Paul is defining the “true Jew,” but he is **not** saying that true Christians now become the true Jews, that is, as some suppose, the Church is now the true Israel. In his address to the naturally born Jews (Rom 2:17ff) Paul is clarifying how naturally born Jews become the real or spiritual Jews before God: it requires more than a physical link to Abraham and the sign of the OT covenant, circumcision. “...**Neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh.**” The physical circumcision was not the real circumcision that counted before God, it was the circumcision of the heart. How did God make a distinction in the OT between the physical and spiritual circumcision in Jer 4:4?

2:29 Second part of the definition of a true Jew: he must also have received the “**circumcision is that of the heart by the Spirit and not be the written code.**” God never accepted the Jew who merely followed the outward rites of his religion, but had no heart for Him. God always accepted the “**Jew who is one inwardly,**” not just externally. This is defined as the “**circumcision is of the heart.**” How is this “circumcision” defined in Col 2:11?

- If the “**circumcision of the heart**” means the cutting away of the flesh such that the spirit within man is no longer linked or integrated with the flesh. This operation is real and was made “without hands,” that is, it happened in the spiritual part of man as “**the removal of the body of the flesh**” from the spirit of the new man. In the new

**NOTES**

birth the two (the flesh and the spirit of man) are separated. This becomes the foundation for chapter 7 and 8, to understand how the spirit can be empowered to conquer the flesh. How was this expressed in the OT commands in Deut 10:16? Do you see any parallel to believers today?

- There was a lot of pressure from the Judaizers to comply with their demands of ritual circumcision for all Christians. Paul was stoned, falsely accused and imprisoned for years over this issue. The phrase “his praise is not from men” refers to the spiritual circumcision does not result in the acceptance by Jewish Christians since it is invisible, but “his praise is...from God.” The true heart-circumcised believer is not seeking acceptance or praise from men, but from God. Only God sees this circumcision. How does 1 Cor 4:5 encourage the believer to value more the “praise of God” than the “praise from men?”