

Romans 2:12-29
February 1, 2015

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Open with a reading of Luke 6:46-49.

Q: What message do you hear Jesus communicating in this parable? [If we claim to be a follower of Christ while not doing what He says, we are like a man building a house without a foundation. The faith walk will be so weak that when the hard times come, your faith potentially won't hold up. Your "house" will collapse and will be "completely destroyed."]

Now put yourself in Paul's shoes. Paul is sharing a similar teaching with his Jewish readers. It's a difficult and highly charged topic. The Jews really believe they are God's chosen people, and understandably so! They believe that as long as they are of the blood line of Abraham, they have been given the Law, and have been physically circumcised, they are secure in their relationship to God. Paul wants them to feel secure in their relationship to God, but for the right reasons. But in order to get to the right reasons, he has to dismantle their faulty thinking. They were resting on their lineage and their Law, instead of grasping that possession of the Law is not the same as "practicing" the Law! God cares about the practice part! That's why He bothered to lay out His Laws in the first place. They weren't to be admired, but to be practiced!

What is the one thing I want my audience to know? To whom much is given, much is required. What do I want them to do about it? Express our faith through obedience.

Transition: The same message Paul is giving his Jewish readers is the same message to us as Christians. "To whom much is given, much is required." It will get a bit more complicated. Not only is "much required from those whom much has been given," but what we do has to be done with the right heart motivation. In other words, outward religious acts done for the wrong reasons don't please God either. He knows our motivations and wants to see our acts flow out of our love for Him. I think we can do this. As we study the rest of Chapter 2, let's consider that *all of us can live obedient lives before God by following basic PRINCIPLES of discipleship.* Let's begin.

BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read Romans 2:12-16]

V.12:

- All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. [Witmer- Gentiles who sin will perish, but the Law of Moses will not be used as a standard of judgment against them]

V.13:

- For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. [God does not give eternal life or justification to those who perform good works, but to those who believe (trust) in Him and whose conduct reveals their regenerate hearts.]

V.14:

- (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law,

V.15:

- since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.)

V.16:

- This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

Process Observations/Questions:

- **Q V.12** – Who are the ones who “sin apart from the law?” [Gentiles] Conversely, who are the ones who “sin under the law?” [The Jews who received the Mosaic Law.]
- **Observation** - Gentiles who sin will perish, but the Law of Moses will not be used as a standard of judgment against them. God is not going to judge the Gentiles on a set of laws they never rec'd, but the Jews who did receive the Law will be judged by what they received.]
- **Q V.13** – Who does God consider “righteous?” [Those who not only hear the law, but **obey** the law. This was important because the possession of the law was not the same as practicing the Law.]
- **Q: V.13** – What is Paul trying to express to the Jews? [It's not good enough to possess or hear the law. It's meaningless if you don't obey it. James made the same point in Jam 1:22-25 “Faith without works is dead]
- **Clarify V.13** – But let's stay clear, God is not giving eternal life to those who “perform good works,” but to those who trust Christ (Eph 2:8-9). Those who trust Christ should be experiencing a transformation of the heart, which is a lifelong process. But in that process, our faith should be expressed through our deeds.
- **Q V.15** – How did the Gentiles do the things required by the law without having heard the Mosaic Law? [The law was written on their hearts.]
- **Observation:** All of us were born with a moral compass. God wrote His Law on the tablets of our heart. That is why every culture on this earth has a sense of sin, fear of judgment and an attempt to atone for sin.
- **Observation:** Notice in v.15 that we all have a conscience. Definition: It is the faculty of the mind, or inborn sense of right and wrong, by which we judge the moral character of human conduct. It too has been tainted by sin! Conscience is an important part of human nature, but it is not an absolutely trustworthy indicator of what is right. One's conscience can be “good” (Acts 23:1; 1 Tim. 1:5, 19) and “clear” (Acts 24:16; 1 Tim. 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:3; Heb. 13:18), but it can also be “guilty” (Heb. 10:22), “corrupted” (Titus 1:15), “weak” (1 Cor. 8:7, 10, 12), and “seared” (1 Tim. 4:2). All people need to trust the Lord Jesus Christ so that “the blood of Christ” might “cleanse [their] consciences” (Heb. 9:14).
- **Observation:** There is a third divine standard God uses to judge us (the first two were truth and impartiality) – the Light he gives us. If one has an abundance of light about God (the Jews), judgment will be based on this abundance of knowledge about God. If one has a paucity of light about God (the Gentiles), then judgment will be based on very little knowledge (relatively speaking) about God. No one will be judged for light they did not receive; everyone will be judged for light they did receive.

- **X-Ref John 1:1-9, 3:19-21** – Q: Do you see based on v.5 that the light of Christ is available in darkness for anyone who wants to acknowledge it? Look at 3:19-21 – It’s the same truth. V.19 implies that we can see the light, but chose to love darkness instead. They understood their two choices: light or darkness. Hanegraaff does a wonderful job on his radio show describing the free will choice we have to move toward the light. If we seek Him, He says we shall find Him. He’s never far away! The more we move toward the light, which is Christ Himself, the more spiritual insight and revelation He shows us.
- **Application Q:** So what principles do you see that will help us *live a life of obedience based on verses 12-16? What should motivate us?* [The principle is to whom much is given, much is required. If we know God’s will, we need to be doing God’s will. To just hear God’s Word and store up the knowledge of His Word without it being expressed, we are just like the Jews who thought possession of the Law was good enough.]
- **X-Ref: Luke 12:48b** – “to whom much is given, much is required.” Jesus is stressing at the big picture level that faith and a life of obedience are integrally connected. And especially to those who have been entrusted with more, He is expecting “much, much more” from them. [Principle: If God has entrusted us with much, He’s going to expect much, much more from us]

Read Romans 2:17-29

V.17:

- Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God;

V.18:

- if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law;

V.19:

- if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark,

V.20:

- an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth—

V.21:

- you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal?

V.22:

- You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?

V.23:

- You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law?

V.24:

- As it is written: “God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”

V.25:

- Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised.

V.26:

- If those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised?

V.27:

- The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker.

V.28:

- A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical.

V.29:

- No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God.

Process Observations/Questions:

- **Q V.17-24** – What is the basic question Paul is raising to those who call themselves Jews? [Do you practice what you preach? Do you realize how hypocritical you're teaching everyone else the law, while you break them?]
- **Observation V.24** – The Jews hypocrisy dishonored God, so the Gentiles were saying, "Why should we honor God when His Chosen People don't follow Him?"
- **Q V.25-29** – In addition to valuing the possession of the Law that was only given to God's chosen children, what else did the Jews count on as proof of their security in their relationship to God? [Circumcision – They thought the outward sign of circumcision was all that mattered, but in fact, God expected obedience from His covenant people]
- **Q. V.25-29** – What is the true definition of circumcision? [Circumcision is of the *heart* that happens by the Holy Spirit upon our profession of faith in Christ.]
- **Q. V.29** – Who is a true Jew? [Those of us who are circumcised in the heart!]
- **Application Q:** How are Christians just like the Jews? Do we boast about our salvation, but turn away lost people because they don't see a change in us? Do we rest on our salvation, without expressing our faith through the gifts, talents and abilities He's given us?
- **Application Q:** So what principles do you see that will help us *live a life of obedience based on verses 17-29?*

LOOK:

There are some basic principles we need to follow in order to *live a life of obedience that is pleasing to God*. We need to **build the right foundation, i.e on Christ, learn God's teachings, and then serve God by practicing His teachings!** But all of this starts with the heart.

The Gospel of Christ demands *inward change*: "You must be born again." (John 3:7) Once we placed our full faith and trust in Christ, we were sealed by the Holy Spirit. By definition, our hearts are positioned to be transformed, but we have to make the free will choice to be yielded to how He leads us. We can choose not to listen to His voice. We can read His commands and teachings all day long, know them inside and out – just like the Jew, who knew the Law inside out, and still do nothing. None of us want to be reminded that on Judgment Day, our expressions of our faith through the good works He's gifted us to do in His name, will be evaluated. Remember, "to whom much is given, much is required."

Let's ask the Lord to help us successfully serve Him by recalibrating our hearts and opening our ears so we can hear His Spirit speak to us, guide us and lead us.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1992). *Wiersbe's expository outlines on the New Testament* (pp. 367–368). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

II. Judgment Is According to a Person's Deeds (2:6–16)

The Jews thought they held the highest "status" among God's people, not realizing that it is one thing to be a hearer of the Law, and quite another to be a doer (v. 13). Keep in mind that these verses do not tell us how to be saved. They describe how God judges mankind according to the deeds performed in the course of life. Verses 7–8 are not talking about a person's occasional actions, but the total purpose and drift of his life, the "life-choice" as William Newell describes it. People do not get eternal life by patiently seeking it; but if they are seeking for life, they will find it in Christ.

"Every man" (v. 6), "every soul" (v. 9), "every man" (v. 10)—these phrases show that God is no respecter of persons but judges all mankind on the basis of the lives they have lived. One might ask, "But is God just in judging men this way? After all, the Jews have had the Law and the Gentiles did not." Yes, God is just, as vv. 12–15 explain. God will judge people according to the light they have received. But never think that the Gentiles (who were unaware of Moses) lived apart from law; for the moral law of God was written on their hearts (see 1:19). Dan Crawford, veteran missionary to Africa, came out of the jungles and said, "The heathen are sinning against a flood of light." "It is most evident from Scripture," writes Dr. Roy Laurin, "that men will be judged according to the knowledge of God which they possess and never according to any higher standard they do not possess." The Jews hear the Law but refuse to do it, and will be thus judged more severely. The same will happen to sinners who hear God's Word today but will not heed it.

III. Judgment Is According to the Gospel of Christ (2:17–29)

Twice now Paul has mentioned a "day of judgment" (vv. 5 and 16). Now he states that this judgment will be of the heart, when God will reveal all secrets. Christ will be the Judge, and the issue will be, "What did you do with the Gospel of Christ?"

The Jews boasted of their racial and religious privileges. Because God had given them His Word, they knew His will and had a finer sense of values. They looked upon the Gentiles as

blind, in the dark, fools, and babes (vv. 19–20). The Jews considered themselves to be God's exclusive favorites; but what they failed to see was that these very privileges obligated them to live holy lives. They disobeyed themselves the very law they preached to the Gentiles. The result was that even the "wicked Gentiles" blasphemed God's name because of the sins of the Jews! Paul is referring perhaps to Isa. 52:5, Ezek. 36:21–22, or Nathan's words to David in 2 Sam. 12:14.

If any people had "religion," it was the Jews; yet their religion was a matter of outward ceremony and not inward reality. They boasted of their rite of circumcision, a ceremony that identified them with the living God; yet what good is a physical rite if there is no obedience to God's Word? Paul even goes so far as to say that the uncircumcised Gentile who obeyed God's Word was better off than the circumcised Jew who disobeyed it (v. 27), and that the circumcised Jew who disobeyed God was looked upon as uncircumcised! For a true Jew is one who has faith inwardly, whose heart has been changed, and not one who merely follows outward ceremonies in the flesh. Verse 27 boldly states that the Gentiles who by nature, though uncircumcised, fulfill the Law are going to judge the Jews who transgress God's standards!

The Gospel of Christ demands an inward change: "You must be born again" (John 3:7). It is not obedience to a religious system that will allow one to pass the test when Christ judges the secrets of men's hearts. It is the Gospel of Christ that is God's power unto salvation, both to Jew and Gentile (Rom. 1:16). If a person has never believed the Gospel and received Christ, then he or she stands condemned. The Jews, with all their religion and legalism, were (and are) just as much under sin as the Gentiles—and more so, because to them were given greater privileges and opportunities to know the truth.

How many people are going to hell because they think God is going to judge them according to their own good opinion of themselves, their status, or their religion? God does not judge according to these principles, but according to truth, according to our deeds, and according to the Gospel of Christ. Thus, in chapter 1 Paul proves that the Gentiles are without excuse, and here in chapter 2, that the Jews are without excuse. In chapter 3, he will prove that the whole world is under sin and condemnation, desperately needing the grace of God.

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible exposition commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 514–518). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

God's Law (vv. 12–24). Paul's statement in Romans 2:11, "For there is no respect of persons with God" would shock the Jew, for he considered himself deserving of special treatment because he was chosen by God. But Paul explained that the Jewish Law only made the guilt of Israel that much greater! God did not give the Law to the Gentiles, so they would not be judged by the Law. Actually, the Gentiles had "the work of the Law written in their hearts" (Rom. 2:15). Wherever you go, you find people with an inner sense of right and wrong; and this inner judge, the Bible calls "conscience." You find among all cultures a sense of sin, a fear of judgment, and an attempt to atone for sins and appease whatever gods are feared.

The Jew boasted in the Law. He was different from his pagan neighbors who worshiped idols! But Paul made it clear that it was not the *possession* of the Law that counted, but the *practice* of the Law. The Jews looked on the Gentiles as blind, in the dark, foolish, immature, and ignorant! But if God found the "deprived" Gentiles guilty, how much more guilty were the "privileged" Jews! God not only judges according to truth (Rom. 2:2), and according to men's

deeds (Rom. 2:6); but He also judges “the secrets of men” (Rom. 2:16). He sees what is in the heart!

The Jewish people had a religion of outward action, not inward attitude. They may have been moral on the outside, but what about the heart? Our Lord’s indictment of the Pharisees in Matthew 23 illustrates the principle perfectly. God not only sees the deeds but He also sees the “thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). It is possible for a Jew to be guilty of theft, adultery, and idolatry (Rom. 2:21–22) even if no one saw him commit these sins outwardly. In the Sermon on the Mount we are told that such sins can be committed in the heart.

Instead of glorifying God among the Gentiles, the Jews were dishonoring God; and Paul quoted Isaiah 52:5 to prove his point. The pagan Gentiles had daily contact with the Jews in business and other activities, and they were not fooled by the Jews’ devotion to the Law. The very Law that the Jews claimed to obey only indicted them!

Circumcision (vv. 25–29). This was the great mark of the covenant, and it had its beginning with Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation (Gen. 17). To the Jews, the Gentiles were “uncircumcised dogs.” The tragedy is that the Jews depended on this physical mark instead of the spiritual reality it represented (Deut. 10:16; Jer. 9:26; Ezek. 44:9). A true Jew is one who has had an *inward* spiritual experience in the heart, and not merely an outward physical operation. People today make this same mistake with reference to baptism or the Lord’s Supper, or even church membership.

God judges according to “the secrets of the heart” (Rom. 2:16), so that He is not impressed with mere outward formalities. An obedient Gentile with no circumcision would be more acceptable than a disobedient Jew with circumcision. In fact, a disobedient Jew turns his circumcision into *uncircumcision* in God’s sight, for God looks at the heart. The Jews praised each other for their obedience to the Law, but the important thing is the “praise of God” and not the praise of men (Rom. 2:29). When you recall that the name “Jew” comes from “Judah” which means “praise,” this statement takes on new meaning (Gen. 29:35; 49:8).

Witmer, J. A. (1985). Romans. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 444–470). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

3. JESUS CHRIST (2:12–16).

2:12. God’s impartiality in judgment is also seen in the fact that He will deal with people in accordance with the dispensation in which they live. “The Law was given through Moses” (John 1:17), which marks the beginning of the dispensation of Law. The Law was provided for God’s Chosen People Israel, and the Gentiles were considered outside the Law. Therefore Paul declared, **All who** (lit., “as many as”) **sin apart from the Law** (lit., “without Law”) **will also perish apart from the Law.** Gentiles who sin will perish, but the Law of Moses will not be used as a standard of judgment against them. On the other hand the Jews **who sin under** (lit., “in the sphere of”) **the Law will be judged by the Law.** The Gentiles are not excused from God’s judgment, but they will not be judged according to the standard (the Mosaic Law) that was not given to them.

2:13. Reading the Mosaic Law was a regular part of each synagogue service, so that Jews were **those who hear the Law.** However, being recognized as **righteous** was not the automatic concomitant of being a Jew and hearing the Law. Those **who will be declared righteous** (a forensic action usually trans. “justified,” e.g., 3:24; see comments on 1:17 on “justify”) are **those**

who obey the Law (lit., “the doers of the Law”). James made the same point (James 1:22–25). Again (cf. comments on Rom. 2:7–10) God does not give eternal life or justification to those who perform good works, but to those who believe (trust) in Him and whose conduct reveals their regenerate hearts.

2:14–15. The Jews looked down on the **Gentiles** partly because they did **not have the** revelation of God’s will in the Mosaic **Law**. But, as Paul pointed out, there are moral Gentiles who **do by nature things required by the Law**. Such persons show that the Law is not to be found only on tablets of stone and included in the writings of Moses; it is also inscribed in their hearts and is reflected in their actions, consciences, and thoughts. The Law given to Israel is in reality only a specific statement of God’s moral and spiritual requirements for everyone. Moral Gentiles by their actions **show that the requirements** (lit., “the work”) **of the Law are written on their hearts**. This is confirmed by **their consciences**, the faculty within human beings that evaluates their actions, along with **their thoughts** that either accuse or excuse them of sin. This is why Paul called such Gentiles **a law for themselves** (v. 14).

Conscience is an important part of human nature, but it is not an absolutely trustworthy indicator of what is right. One’s conscience can be “good” (Acts 23:1; 1 Tim. 1:5, 19) and “clear” (Acts 24:16; 1 Tim. 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:3; Heb. 13:18), but it can also be “guilty” (Heb. 10:22), “corrupted” (Titus 1:15), “weak” (1 Cor. 8:7, 10, 12), and “seared” (1 Tim. 4:2). All people need to trust the Lord Jesus Christ so that “the blood of Christ” might “cleanse [their] consciences” (Heb. 9:14).

2:16. The Greek text of this verse begins with the phrase “**in the day**.” The words **this will take place** are not in the Greek but are supplied to tie this verse back to the main idea of this section (vv. 5–13), namely, God’s righteous judgment (v. 5). Verses 14–15 are actually a parenthetical idea (as indicated in the NIV). This was brought to mind by verse 13 and the Jewish prejudice against the Gentiles. The certainty of divine judgment is emphasized by the words **God will judge** (lit., “God judges”). The Agent of divine judgment is **Jesus Christ** (cf. John 5:22, 27; Acts 17:31). This judgment will deal with **men’s secrets** (lit., “the hidden things of men”) and will reveal those things and prove God’s judgment right (cf. 1 Cor. 4:5). Paul’s **gospel** is not the standard of God’s judgment. The idea is that the righteous judgment of God is an essential ingredient of the gospel Paul preached and a reason for trusting Jesus’ finished redemption.

In this section (2:1–16) God is seen as the Creator-Sovereign of the universe conducting the moral government of His human creatures. God’s absolute standards are known. God punishes the wicked and rewards the righteous impartially according to their works, which reveal their hearts. Since no human being—Jesus Christ excepted—can be declared righteous (justified) by God on the basis of his own merit, every human is condemned by God. At this point in Paul’s argument the way a person can secure a righteous standing before God has not yet been presented. Here the emphasis is on the justice of God’s judgment, leading to the conclusion that nobody on his own can be declared righteous by God.

C. Condemnation against unfaithful Jews (2:17–3:8).

1. CONDEMNATION BECAUSE OF THEIR HYPOCRISY (2:17–24).

2:17–20. Paul undoubtedly had the Jews as well as moral Gentiles in mind in the group he addressed as “you who pass judgment on someone else” (v. 1). But there he did not refer to them by name as he did here—**if you call yourself a Jew** (lit., “if you are named a Jew”). In Greek this is a first-class conditional sentence in which the conditional statement is assumed to be true.

Paul was addressing individuals who were truly called Jews and who, in fact, gloried in that name. This fact is followed by a list of eight other moral and religious details in which the Jews gloried in their sense of superiority to the Gentiles, all of these included as part of the “if” clause (vv. 17–21a).

The verbs used in this list are all in the present tense or have the force of the present, which emphasizes the habitual nature of the action: (1) The Jews **rely on the Law**; they put their confidence in the fact that God gave it to them. (2) The Jews **brag about their relationship to God** (lit., “boast in God”; cf. v. 23), which means they glory in their covenantal ties with God. As a result of these two things the Jews (3) **know His will** (they have an awareness of God’s desires and plan) and they (4) **approve of** (*dokimazeis*, “to test and approve what passes the test”) **what is superior** (*diapheronta*, “the things that differ and as a result excel”; the same Gr. word in Phil. 1:10 is trans. “what is best”). They have a concern for spiritually superior standards. These abilities of Jews exist because they (5) **are instructed** (lit., “are being instructed”) **by the Law**. Their catechetical lessons as youths and the regular reading of the Law in the synagogues provided this continuing instruction.

Though the next verb (in Rom. 2:19) continues the first-class conditional structure begun in verse 17, it also marks a transition of thought. It is the perfect tense of a verb which means “to seek to persuade,” in which tense it has the meaning “to believe.” (6) Many Jews were **convinced** and as a result believed certain things about themselves in relationship to Gentiles. Paul listed four of these: **a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor** (*paideutēn*, “one who disciplines, a trainer”) **of the foolish**, and **a teacher of infants**. (7) This belief by Jews rested in their having **in the Law the embodiment** (*morphōsin*, “outline, semblance”; used elsewhere in the NT only in 2 Tim. 3:5) **of knowledge and truth** (the Gr. has the definite article “the” with both nouns: “the knowledge and the truth”).

2:21–24. Without doubt as Paul enumerated this list of moral and religious distinctives, he got repeated affirmative responses from his Jewish readers. The Jews gloried in their special spiritual position, which contrasted with the Gentiles. The apostle then summed up all these distinctives in the clause, (8) **You, then, who teach others**. Then Paul asked the question, **Do you not teach yourself?** This question is followed by a series of questions on specific prohibitions in the Law—against **stealing**, committing **adultery**, hating **idols**—each of which a Jew (“you” throughout Rom. 2:17–27 is sing., not pl.) was guilty of doing after telling others not to do those things. Paul indicted such a Jew for hypocrisy: **You who brag about** (“are boasting in”; cf. v. 17) **the Law, do you dishonor God by breaking the Law?** An honest Jew would have to respond to Paul’s questions by admitting his guilt and his hypocrisy. Paul did not condemn this hypocrisy of the Jews on his own authority; he quoted their own Scriptures (the close of Isa. 52:5, in the LXX). Their hypocrisy dishonored God; also it caused **Gentiles** to blaspheme God. “Why should we honor God,” Gentiles may have reasoned, “when His Chosen People do not follow Him?”

2. CONDEMNATION BECAUSE OF THEIR TRUST IN RITES (2:25–29)

The Jews trusted not only in the Law of Moses, as the preceding paragraph shows (vv. 17–24), but also in circumcision as the sign of their special covenantal relationship with God. But Paul argued that trust in the rite itself was meaningless and was a basis for God’s judgment.

2:25–27. **Circumcision has value if you observe** (“are practicing”) **the Law**. Conversely, **if you break the Law** (and they did), **you have become as though you had not been circumcised**. In the Greek this second part of verse 25 is interesting: “If you are a lawbreaker,

your circumcision has become a foreskin.” In other words a Jewish lawbreaker is just like a Gentile lawbreaker; the Jews’ rite of circumcision counts for nothing.

The opposite is also true. **If those who are not circumcised** (lit., “if the foreskin,” a word used by Jews as a slang expression for a Gentile; cf. the comments on v. 25) **keep** (*phyllasē*, “guard” and therefore “keep” or “observe”; cf. 1 Tim. 5:21) **the Law’s requirements** (and apparently some Gentiles did), **will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised?** Paul concluded that a Gentile who **obeys** (“fulfills”) **the Law** judges a Jew who, despite his having **the written code and circumcision**, is a **lawbreaker**. A Gentile who obeys what the Law requires, even though he does not know the Law (Rom. 2:14) is in God’s sight similar to a circumcised Jew. This thought would be revolutionary for Jews who considered themselves far superior to Gentiles (cf. vv. 17–21).

2:28–29. These verses form the conclusion to the entire section that begins with verse 17. Being a true or genuine **Jew** is not a matter of **outward** or external things (such as wearing phylacteries, paying tithes, or being circumcised). Genuine **circumcision** is not the physical rite itself. Rather, a genuine Jew **is one inwardly** and true **circumcision is ... of the heart and by the Spirit**. The NIV has rendered the Greek words “in spirit” as “by the Spirit,” as though they refer to the Holy Spirit. However, it is better to understand this verse as saying that circumcision of heart fulfills “the spirit” of God’s Law instead of mere outward conformity to the Law. Some Jews followed the Law’s regulation outwardly, but their hearts were not right with God (Isa. 29:13). A circumcised heart is one that is “separated” from the world and dedicated to God. The true Jew receives his **praise ... not from men** (as did the Pharisees) **but from God**, who sees people’s inward natures (cf. Matt. 6:4, 6) and discerns their hearts (cf. Heb. 4:12).

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (pp. 1682 – 1700). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

2:14–15 One of two options is likely in understanding this difficult section, which people have sometimes interpreted as saying that a salvation exists outside of Jesus Christ. One option is that Gentile Christians are those who have the “law” written on their hearts, corresponding to Jeremiah’s depiction of the new covenant (Jr 31:33). Gentiles do what the law requires without having it. Though not ethnic Jews, they are the “true Jews” because of their circumcised hearts (Rm 2:28–29). They obey the law and are declared righteous (v. 13). A second option is that Paul was speaking of Gentiles in general who respond positively to their moral sense and the light they have in ways that correspond to God’s intentions, which correspond to the law Jews received.

Boa, K., & Kruidenier, W. (2000). Romans (Vol. 6, p. 80). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

If one has an abundance of light about God (the Jews), judgment will be based on this abundance of knowledge about God. If one has a paucity of light about God (the Gentiles), then judgment will be based on very little knowledge (relatively speaking) about God. No one will be judged for light they did not receive; everyone will be judged for light they did receive.