

Cornerstone Bible Church

The Jews and the Law

(Romans 2:17-29)

Survey of Romans part 8

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Text: Romans 2:17-25

¹⁷But if you bear the name "Jew," and rely upon the Law, and boast in God,

¹⁸and know His will, and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law,

¹⁹and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,

²⁰a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, **having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth**,

²¹you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one should not steal, do you steal?

Text: Romans 2:17-25

²²You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?

²³You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God?

²⁴For "THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU," just as it is written.

²⁵For indeed circumcision is of value, if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.

²⁶If therefore the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?

Text: Romans 2:17-25

²⁷And will not he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who though having the letter *of the Law* and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law?

²⁸For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh.

²⁹But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; **and his praise is not from men, but from God.**

Text: Romans 2:17-25

Verse 17 starts with a contrast, because the previous section ended with the gentiles.

REVIEW: THE NEED FOR THE GOSPEL

- a) God's wrath against the iniquity of people (1:16-ff)
- b) The irrevocability of His Judgment: a righteous Judge with a perfect standard (2:1-16)
- c) The culpability of all people before the Law, both Jews and Gentiles (2:17-3:23)

The Jews and the Law: Romans 2:17-25

Paul zooms in to specifically indict the culpability of Jews. Remember that for Jews the world was split into Jews and Gentiles. Paul uses his intimate knowledge of Jewish thought and culture to address them.

There were many Jews in Rome.

Paul's argument breakdown into three sections:

1. The Jews **incorrect self-assessment** with respect to the Law (17-20)
2. The Jews **inconsistency** by not keeping the Law (21-24)
3. The True Meaning of **Keeping the Law** (25-29)

1. The Jews incorrect self-assessment regarding the Law 17-20

Paul's description of how Jews viewed themselves reminds me of "us"

a) The Jews were proud of their lineage: "you bear the name "Jew". Derivative from the land of Judea.

Their pride was tied to the fact that their land and heritage had been apportioned by God to their forefathers.

The tying knot in Jewish culture was a land, a people and a promised King. Ex: Genealogies → From **2 Chapter** to **Matthew** and **Luke**

1. The Jews incorrect self-assessment regarding the Law 17-20

b) They relied on the Law: TORAH; first 5 books of Moses.

The TORAH was like the “homologoumena” for the Jews (accepted by both Pharisees and Sadducees).

The TORAH was the way of life: “**Do these things and you shall live.**” *E.g. Jesus’ answer to the rich young ruler*

c) They boasted in their God: they knew YAHWEH.

They were chosen by GOD to be their special people, they had access to Him through their priests, they had the word of His prophets. YAHWEH was their glory. See **Jeremiah 9:23-24**

1. The Jews incorrect self-assessment regarding the Law 17-20

Psalm 115 is a good example: “Not to us, O LORD, not to us, But to your name give glory Because of your mercy, because of your truth. ²Why should the nations say, "Where, now, is their God?" ³**But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.** ⁴Their idols are silver and gold, the work of man's hands.”

d) The ancients tied their god's power to their armies' victories.

Israel had defeated the mightiest armies without shooting a sling. **Pharaoh** (Exodus), the walls of **Jericho**, the mighty **Assyrians** in the days of Hezekiah. **Cyrus** the Mede granted the return to their land. Because of Yahweh.

The Jews boasted in the SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD!

1. The Jews incorrect self-assessment regarding the Law 17-20

e) They knew His will: as recipients, custodians and interpreters of His oracles.

They **had tested and tried** the things of greatest value.
kathcou,menoj evk tou/ no,mou catechized out of the Law
against the teachings and philosophies of men.

f) They bragged of a higher calling for humanity: 19-20
¹⁹... a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in
darkness, ²⁰a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the
immature, *having in the Law the embodiment of
knowledge and of the truth...*”

1. The Jews incorrect self-assessment regarding the Law 17-20

Paul is being sarcastic (in my opinion):

pe,poiqa,j te seauto.n “**you have seduced yourself to believe**” ...

that you are in the world, for the grandiose purpose to *guide the blind, illumine the unlearned, correct the fool and instruct children.*

g) These are concomitant and equivalent expressions

They thought they were the LIGHT OF THE WORLD and SALT OF THE EARTH.

To counsel the confused, shine truth to the ignorant, instruct the naïve and develop the younger generation.

That’s a Mission Statement or VBS topic!

1. The Jews incorrect self-assessment regarding the Law 17-20

It was nonetheless true ... they were supposed to be.

God established Israel to be a light to the nations, but instead, they adopted the gods and customs of the nations that surrounded them.

Side note: it has been the unfortunate pattern of God's people to fill in the voids the world leaves.

Music, preaching, worldviews, etc.

Luke 14:34-35 "Therefore, salt is good; but if even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned? ³⁵"It is useless either for the soil or for the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

2. The Jews inconsistent hypocrisy by not keeping the Law 21-25

²¹you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one should not steal, do you steal? ²²You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God? ²⁴For "THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU," just as it is written.

- a) This goes back to his beginning argument. Knowledge of the truth does not avert condemnation.
- b) Affirming the righteousness of the Law, does not acquit us from its condemnation.
- c) ***Defending the Law is not equivalent to fulfill it!***

2. The Jews inconsistent hypocrisy by not keeping the Law 21-25

- They condemned **adultery**, while committing adultery (cf. Matthew 5)
- They condemned **stealing**, while robbing others (rigged scales, unfair payment)
- They condemned **idolatry**, while trading with robbed items from temples (cf. Pillar / Leon Morris)
- They **boasted in the Law**, but they broke it at every point; it is impossible to keep it

Summary: Instead of being light to the world and reflecting God's Glory, they caused people to blaspheme God on their account. Perhaps from **Isaiah 52:5 and Ezekiel 36:20, 23**

3. True Law Keeping 25-29

²⁵For indeed circumcision is of value, **if** you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. ²⁶**If** therefore the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? ²⁷And will not he who is physically uncircumcised, **if** he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who though having the letter *of the Law* and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law?

- a) Circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant:

- b) Paul places the **validity** of the outward sign **in the effects.** of a transformed heart.

Side note: same argument for Christian sacraments. In and of themselves they have no power.

3. True Law Keeping 25-29

b) Paul uses an analogy to humble them:

- Gentiles doing by nature the things of the Law
- They were more “circumcised” before God than the outwardly circumcised.
- We must be careful how we read. **Notice the “IF”.**

c) Perhaps (I am speculating) Paul alluded to people like:

- **Rahab** the harlot
- **Ruth** the Moabite
- **Obed Edom** the Gittite (a Philistine in whose house the ark of God dwelt for three months and God blessed Him),
- The Queen of **Shebah**, **Naaman** the Syrian, **Nebuchadnezzar**
- In Jesus’ days, the **Samaritan woman**, the **Syro-phoenician woman** and the people from **Tyre** and **Sidon**.

3. True Law Keeping 25-29

d) Verse 27 echoes Jesus' words about many coming from the east and the west, to sit at His table.

From the beginning God's plan was to reach all kinds of people, and not just the Jews.

e) Finally Paul points to what is a true Jew: ²⁸For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. ²⁹But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; **and his praise is not from men, but from God.**

3. True Law Keeping 25-29

This is the language of a New Covenant as promised in Jeremiah 32 and Ezekiel 36.

The heart and not the flesh, would be circumcised and the Law, would be written in the hearts of those called into Covenant comp. Hebrews 8.

WRAPPING UP: Paul destroyed **the Jewish pride**, their self-infatuation and claims to righteousness. This is how he built his case to be able to conclude as he does in **Romans 11:32** “For God has shut up all in disobedience that He might show mercy to all”

CONCLUSION:

WHO IS THE TRUE ISRAELITE? Who is the Righteous Jew?

Jesus was the true Israelite

- He kept and upheld the Law Matthew 5:21-24
- He trusted God perfectly and at all times (*cf* Luke 4)
- He was the instructor of the ignorant
- He proclaimed “let the children come to Me”
- He was light to those in darkness Matthew 4:16
- He is the embodiment of wisdom and knowledge
Colossians 2:3
- He is the truth (not just a possessor of it) John 14:6

Israel was set to be the shadow and imperfect precursor of what Messiah would be, but they failed to keep the Law

END