

In chapter 1, Paul pointed out that humanity inevitably sinks into the depths of sin when they reject God. In chapter 2, he points out the hypocrisy of God's people when they commit the same sins as those unbelievers. The Jews were relying on their Jewish heritage and bloodline to protect them from the consequences of their sin but Paul assures them that God judges sin regardless of who commits it. Paul is building a case to show that Jews and Gentiles alike are all guilty of sin and are in need of a Savior (Rom. 3:23).

Verses 1-16: After describing the sinfulness of those who reject God and how that they will not escape God's judgment in the previous chapter, Paul now addresses those who claim to know God, focusing particularly on the Jews. God's judgment is according to the truth and Jews who are guilty of the same sins will not escape the wrath of God (vs. 1-5). God judges men based on their deeds (v. 6-11) and no one will escape the judgment of God whether they be Jew or Gentile "for there is no respect of persons with God" (v. 11). Knowledge of the law or the lack of it has no bearing on the judgment of God for even the Gentiles are able to listen to their conscience and obey the essence of the law (vs. 12-16). Paul spent the previous chapter showing that mankind is capable of terrible sins and now he spends the remainder of this chapter showing us that even those with a religious heritage or bloodline are not protected from God's wrath against their sin. This is why we all need a Savior, whether we be Jew or Gentile.

17 Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, 18 And knowest *his* will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law;

"Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God" – Paul addresses the Jew who believes that he is in a privileged position because he is a Jew. The Jews (as a nation) were given the law of God and have a special relationship with God. However, not every Jew belongs to God because salvation depends on faith, not bloodline. **Rom. 9:6b** *"For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel."* Notice that Paul says "thou art called a Jew," implying that not everyone who considers themselves to be a Jew is a genuine Jew.

"And knowest *his* will, and approvest [to test or examine] the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law" – Because of their Jewish heritage, the Jews had the benefit of being taught about God, His will and His ways. Through the instruction contained in the law they were able to discern between right and wrong ("approvest the things that are more excellent"). God had revealed Himself to the Jews more than any other nation on earth but their pride had caused them to believe that it was because of virtues within them. However, the opposite was true: **Deut. 7:6-8** *"For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt."*

19 And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, 20 An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.

"And art confident" – The blessings of God on the Jews had made them proud and confident of their spiritual superiority over Gentiles. They believed their position made them experts concerning God and His law.

"that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes" – The Jews (at least the one's that trusted in their ability to keep the law) arrogantly believed in their spiritual superiority and that it placed them in a position to be able to instruct the "less knowledgeable" in the ways of God.

"which hast the form [outline or shape] of knowledge and of the truth in the law" – Paul uses the Greek word *morphosis* for form, which refers to an external appearance, implying that the Jews had the appearance of knowledge and truth according to the law. However, their strict and legalistic adherence to the letter of the law demonstrated that they did not understand that the law's true purpose was to lead them (and us) to Christ (**Gal. 3:24** *"Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith."*). The law can only deal with the external (the actual acts of sin) and cannot change a person's heart.

21 Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? 22 Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?

Paul points out the hypocrisy of a Jew who considers himself a spiritual teacher that teaches others not to sin and yet commits those sins himself. He should listen to his own teaching and repent of these things. Sin is still sin whether committed by a Jew or a Gentile. The Greek word for "sacrilege" means "to rob temples." Many interpreters believe that it may have been a common practice for Jews to loot pagan temples for anything made of precious metals (idols, vessels, etc.). The Jews may have used God's hatred of idolatry as justification for this practice and yet their real motivation was for personal profit, a violation of God's command (Deut. 7:25). Doing so for personal gain exposed their own idolatry of money.

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

The Greek word for "dishonourest" means to "to insult or treat with contempt." Paul asks why a Jew, who prides himself with being right with God by keeping the law, should break that law and thereby insult and dishonor God. Do we not also do the same thing as Christians when we willingly sin against God despite the fact that we know better, having experienced the grace and forgiveness of God? Knowing the price that Jesus Christ paid for our sin, why would we want to continually practice it any more?

24 For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written. 25 For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision.

“For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written” – Paul is making a paraphrased quotation of a passage in the OT and most commentators point to **Isa. 52:5**: “*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.*” However, he could also be quoting from **2 Sam. 12:14**, where the LORD is speaking to David after his sin with Bathsheba: “*Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die.*” Regardless, the point is that the people of God, who ought to be bringing glory to God, are actually causing God’s name to be blasphemed among the Gentiles. The world sees our hypocrisy when we don’t practice what we preach. They will blame God for our sinful behavior.

“For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law” – Circumcision was a sign of the covenant relationship between God and the Jews (**Gen. 17:10** [God speaking to Abraham] “*This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised*”). Being circumcised was obedience to the terms of the covenant with God and therefore was a benefit to the Jew. However, disobedience to God’s law was a violation of that covenant.

“but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision” – A Jew that broke God’s law was acting as if he were not circumcised and not in covenant with the LORD. Willful disobedience to the law was a rejection of God and His covenant and thus forfeited the benefits that came through the covenant.

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

Gentiles (the uncircumcision) who obeyed the righteous things of the law were demonstrating their faith and love for God and were expressing that love in their desire to obey Him. God will honor these people’s faith and will treat them as if they were circumcised and part of the covenant.

27 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?

Circumcision was something that was performed by men and Paul is contrasting it with uncircumcision, which is the natural state of males when they are born. Jews were proud of their circumcision and Paul states that if those who never underwent the procedure of circumcision are keeping the law, would that fact not condemn the circumcised Jew who has the benefit of the written law and circumcision and still is a transgressor of the law? How would God view the irony that Gentiles, who were without the law, were obeying it while the Jews, who had the law, were not?

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

Paul is demonstrating that outward appearances do not always reflect inward reality. Being truly Jewish is not based on one’s bloodline nor is being in a covenant relationship with God (of which being circumcised is a sign) based on having our flesh circumcised. These things can be physically true without the spiritual realities behind it being true. The same is true today in church when a person going to the altar to pray during the invitation does not mean that that person is getting right with God. People who talk “Christian talk” aren’t always as spiritual as they might seem.

29 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.

“But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly” – A person can be a “Jew” (one of God’s people) if they are one inwardly regardless of their blood line or the state of their body.

“and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter” – If a person has surrendered themselves to God in faith, then God sees them as circumcised. They are circumcised in their heart and spirit even if “not in the letter” (physically circumcised according to the written law). In fact, God is the One Who has to do the circumcise our hearts at the moment of salvation.

Col. 2:10-11 “*And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ:”*

1 Cor. 7:19 “*Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God.”*

Gal. 5:6 “*For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.”*

Gal. 6:15 “*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.”*

“whose praise is not of men, but of God” – Jews having confidence in the outward signs of being a Jew (bloodline and circumcision) typically are looking for the praise of men. However, those who are circumcised in the heart and spirit will get their praise from God Himself for He is the only One Who can see their inward circumcision.