

**2:1:** *Wherefore thou art without excuse, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest dost practise the same things.*

The previous chapter dealt with ancient history. Paul showed how the Gentiles turned against God, engaged in terrible sins, and God “gave up” on them. It should be noted that Paul’s charges against the Gentiles were a generalization. Not every Gentile lived as Paul described.

Since Paul has dealt with the Gentiles (chapter one), he is now ready to talk about the Jews. The theme of moral decay is continued in this section of the epistle, and it is here that we learn the Jews were as bad as the Gentiles. To better grasp the first verse, the text will be broken into three parts—1a, 1b, and 1c. The text for each division will be *Wherefore thou art without excuse, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest (1a)*. For wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself (1b). *For thou that judgest does practice the same things (1c)*.

In 1a it is said the Jews “judged” the Gentiles. The word *judged* is a present participle. The idea seems to be that a negative judgment or condemnation was made. The Jews knew what the Gentiles had done and they despised them for it. They sat comfortably by passing sentence (Owen, p. 11). However, Paul said the Jews were “without excuse” (1a). This expression comes from a single word (*anapologetos*) which is only found here and 1:20. It means the Jews could not justify their condemnation of the Gentiles. The reason their condemnation was unwarranted is found in 1b. The Gentiles had sinned but the Jews were guilty of these same sins. When the Jews saw the Gentiles sin, they were quick to judge and condemn. When they looked at their own lives, they refused to acknowledge they were guilty of the same wrongs.

Nygren (Romans, p. 117f) shows the Jews believed in two separate standards of judgment. He cites a few passages from the book of Wisdom. One of these says “For even if we sin we are thine, knowing thy dominion.” Also, “God judges the heathen in his wrath; but it is different with us. We are saved from his wrath. When he chastises us, he does so in gentleness.” The Jews were guilty of what Jesus described in Matt. 7. They thought they should correct the Gentiles even though their lives were full of sin (see Matt. 7:1, 3-5).

Regardless of what the Jews thought, Paul showed how God viewed the matter. When the Jews condemned the Gentiles for sin, they also condemned themselves (2:1b). The reason for this is not hard to understand. If an act is sinful for one group of people, it is sinful for all others. If the Jews could correctly charge the Gentiles with sin, and they were doing the very same sins, they condemned themselves.

The Jews might have argued their sins were not as bad as the Gentiles’ transgressions because of the degree, extent, or frequency of the sins. Even if this were true (and I grant it may have been since the Gentiles were completely rejected by God), guilt was chargeable to both. Just because someone is “not as bad” as the other guy, God does not excuse or overlook wrongdoing. Whether there is a little or a lot of guilt before God, guilty is guilty.

**2:2:** *And we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against them that practise such things.*

God is ultimately responsible for judgment. God has made Himself the judge instead of giving this role to individuals, the heads of families, governments, angels, etc. God has reserved this right for Himself because He judges “according to truth.” Paul said this fact was “known.” The word *known* is in the perfect tense; it suggests this knowledge existed in the past and continues to exist. This tense also indicates the character of God is unchanged. In the past God did not look favorably upon those who engaged in evil and this has not changed.

In spite of the modern arguments made about truth (i.e. all things are relative, there is no real standard, we may make up our own system of right and wrong), Paul affirmed there is a standard. There are rules and these rules are applicable to all people. Since there is a standard for right and wrong, there are acts which are contrary to the truth (2:2b). Things can be done (such as the acts found in 1:29-31) that are contrary to truth. These acts will cause people to be punished. This is made clear from the word “practice” (*prasso*). The KJV says “commit.” Here this word, which is in the present tense, means

engaging in “the kind of evil conduct explicitly denounced by ‘God’s righteous decree’” (CBL, GED, 5:279). This word is also used in 1:32. If people have the truth they must oppose anything which is against the truth. Christians must stand up for and defend the ways and will of God. This is a Christian responsibility.

**2:3:** *And reckonest thou this, O man, who judgest them that practise such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?*

The Jews were aware of God and the truth, but at least some of them chose to live like the Gentiles. The Jews who made this choice believed God would somehow overlook their sinful lives and choices. The thought is especially strong because of the pronoun translated “*thou*.” According to Earle (p. 141), “Ordinarily in Greek the pronoun is included in the verb and indicated by the ending. When it is expressed separately (as is the case here, BP) it carries emphasis.”

There are three basic points in the third verse. (1) The Jews *judged* the Gentiles; (2) the Jews *practiced* that for which they condemned the Gentiles (see chapter 1:29-31); and (3) the Jews thought their sins would *not be held against them* at the judgment.

What the Jews thought is identical to how many in our time think. More than a few believe they can live how they want and escape God’s judgment. Most know someone who does a few good works, attends a few worship services, gives money to a religious group, or is friends with a preacher. People hope (or believe) this casual acquaintance with religion will allow them to avoid the judgment and condemnation. This is what the Jews did.

Paul described this kind of life and said it doesn’t work. No matter who people are—Christians, Jews, or pagans—it is impossible to willfully sin and maintain a right relationship with God (Rom. 6:1). If this were possible it would have worked for the Jews since they had Abraham as their father and they had the covenant of circumcision. Since this approach didn’t work for them (Mt. 3:9 and Jn. 8:33), it will not work for us.

This information would have been very disturbing to those who were Jewish. The Hebrew people believed Abraham “stood at the gate of hell to assure that no circumcised Jew would ever enter there” (Willmington, p. 227).

**2:4:** *Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?*

In verse 3 Paul asked a question. Did the Jews think they could escape God’s punishment? Verse four contains a second question: Didn’t the Jews know that God’s kindheartedness (which is here described in three different ways) was designed to lead them to repentance? The Jews apparently drew a wrong conclusion. They persisted in sin, God didn’t punish them, and they concluded the lack of punishment meant everything was okay. The Jewish people should have sensed this conclusion was not right but they didn’t. The reason God allowed the Jews to continue in sin is found in verse 4. A waiting period was given so the Jews could change their minds and return to God (2:4a). God’s patience is described as “*goodness*,” “*forbearance*,” and “*longsuffering*.” God’s *goodness* was supposed to lead people to “*repentance*” (this term occurs only here in this book). For a definition of *repentance*, see the commentary on Acts 3:19. In 2 Cor. 7:10 Paul said repentance comes from true sorrow. Thus, since these Jews would not repent, they did not possess true (godly) sorrow.

The words goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering are preceded by the word “*riches*” (*ploutos*), a term that elsewhere describes wealth (Mt. 13:22; Jas. 5:2). Here Paul used the image of wealth to describe “the abundant generosity of God in Christ” (CBL, GED, 5:224). God offered the Jews plenty of leeway and time. Yet, in spite of His graciousness, they refused to change. They took God’s goodness and used it as a license to sin.

The word *goodness* (*chrestotes*) meant “goodness, kindness, generosity” (Gingrich and Danker, p. 886). The noun *forbearance* “occurs only here and in 3:25 (v. 26 in the Greek). It comes from *anecho*,

which means ‘hold back.’ So here it suggests ‘a delay of punishment.’ It was used in classical Greek for a truce of arms” (Earle, p. 141). “Only God is in a position to declare a truce or to provide clemency for mankind” (CBL, GED, 1:291). God delays and holds back His wrath so people have an opportunity to turn to Him. If lives are not changed, this delay will eventually end (2 Thess. 1:8) because judgment is suspended, not cancelled.

The third word used to describe God is *longsuffering* (*makrothumia*). This word described a person who was “long-tempered” instead of “short tempered.” This term occurs fourteen times in the New Testament. It is the word Peter used in 1 Pet. 3:20. Hogg and Vine say, “Longsuffering is that quality of self-restraint in the face of provocation which does not hastily retaliate or promptly punish; it is the opposite of anger, and is associated with mercy, and is used of God” (First Thessalonians Commentary, pp. 181-182). More information about this term is in the commentary on Gal. 5:22.

Another important term is “*despise*” (*kataphroneo*). Jesus used this word in places like Mt. 6:24; 18:10. Paul asked the Corinthians if they despised the Lord’s church (1 Cor. 11:22). Timothy was told to not let others despise his youth (1 Tim. 4:12). Slaves were forbidden from despising believing masters (1 Tim. 6:2). Here the word means “Think scornfully, regard as nothing” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:270). The Jews had a horrible attitude toward God and His goodness. This was wrong.

This section of letter helps answer some common questions. Many want to know why God allows wicked people to live. If God is all-powerful, why doesn’t He destroy horrible people so good people are not hurt? When our criminal justice system fails to dispense justice, why doesn’t God take matters into His own hands? Those professing atheism frequently ask these questions because the existence of evil men is allegedly contrary to the existence of a kind and loving God. If a good and benevolent God exists, why does He not punish those who are a detriment to society?

In Rom. 2:4 we are told why evil people are allowed to live. God gives these people life (Lk. 6:35b) because He wants them to change. God wants all people to find salvation and go to heaven. This may not be what society wants, but this is God’s will.

What Paul wrote is found in other parts of the Bible. Peter spoke about God’s interest in saving everyone (2 Pet. 3:9), as did Jesus in the parable of the tares (Mt. 13:36-43). In the parable of the tares the field represents the world (verse 38). The righteous and the wicked are normally allowed to continue until the end of their earthly lives so all have an opportunity to find salvation.

The goodness and forbearance of God are blessings that are sometimes misused. There are those who want to “live like the world” and then just prior to death find salvation. There are also those who want to seek salvation only in their old age when they have little else to do. These attitudes and tactics misuse God’s goodness and patience, and anyone who abuses God’s goodness sins. Those who have abused God’s mercy have often died in a lost state because the day they intended to use for repentance never arrived.

**2:5-6:** *but after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up for thyself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; 6 who will render to every man according to his works:*

Here Paul said the Jewish response to God’s goodness and longsuffering was “*hardened*” (*sklerotes*) hearts. This word is found only here in the New Testament; it has the sense of “obstinacy, stubbornness” (Thayer, p. 579). The Jewish people closed their hearts to God and opened their hearts to sin. This problem was so bad Paul used the word “*impenitent*” (*ametanoetos*). This word described a mind which refused to submit to God (Owen, p. 12). It “was used in legal documents to indicate their unchanging character” (CBL, GED, 1:93). A simple definition for it is “unrepentant” (New American Standard Translation). Ralph Earle (Romans, p. 142) added, “One of the most dreaded afflictions of old age today is arteriosclerosis, or hardening of the walls of the arteries. Like most medical terms, this one is derived from the Greek. The word translated ‘hardness’ is sclerotes. Abbot-Smith says that it is used metaphorically for stubbornness. It occurs only here in the NT. Not much is known yet about the cause and cure of physical sclerosis. But the Bible sheds some light on the cause and cure of spiritual sclerosis. It is primarily the result of rejection of light. To obey God fully is to keep one’s heart tender and one’s

spiritual being alive. But disobedience is always followed by a hardening of the spiritual arteries. The consequences of this are just as pathetic as, and far more tragic than, arteriosclerosis.”

The consequence of having a hard heart is given in verse 5. God’s wrath is “*treasured up*” (*thesaurizo*). Jesus used this word in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 6:19, 20). Other places where it is found include 1 Cor. 16:2; Jas. 5:3; 2 Pet. 3:7. Here it means a sinner who despises God’s goodness “stores up wrath, which is released on the day of wrath” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:151). As people persist in sin, the level of their future punishment grows. A time will come when God’s wrath will fall upon them. The accumulation of wrath is individual, so it would seem the level of wrath people face will be equal to what they build up (compare Lk. 12:47-48). This may be compared to pans on a stove. Several pans may be on a stove, but they may be heating at different temperatures. In a similar way, not everyone in hell will experience the same level of pain (wrath).

When judgment day comes, Romans 2:6 promises that every person will be treated fairly. The judgment will be individual, and it will be based upon our “*works*” (verse 6). People will not be able to use their mother, father, brother, sister, religious group, preacher, or anyone else to help them when they stand before the Lord. Each person will be evaluated on the merits of his or her own life. If anyone depends upon his or her good deeds (and some surely will), they will be unsuccessful at obtaining eternal life. Good works cannot equalize, outweigh, or overcome our sins. Every person outside of Christ will be lost (2 Tim. 2:10). Those who will be saved will be those who are in Christ and their works will be the result of their being a faithful Christian.

At the time of judgment, Christians will not be quizzed about doing enough (Lk. 17:10). Rather, it will be a time to determine faithfulness (Mt. 24:45-46; 25:14-30). Christians will be judged on how well they pursued and fulfilled the will of God. Since judgment is going to be individual, logic suggests our punishment or blessing will also be individual (specifically tailored for us). When people are repaid for their works, the principle from Gal. 6:7 teaches that much evil will result in much punishment. A little evil (sin) will require a little punishment (Lk. 12:47-48 and Rom. 2:6). Some good will be met with some reward, a little good with a little reward, and much good with a high degree of reward. Other cross-references are Mt. 10:41 and Mt. 11:21-24. Some believe God will not reward His people, but the Bible does use the word reward (Heb. 11:6).

The final judgment day is spoken of as a one-time event. No Biblical writer refers to “*judgment days.*” There are groups who believe in more than one judgment day, but this belief is not found in Scripture. The judgment day will occur at a specific time and on a specific day. At this time, “*every man*” will be remembered. No one will be overlooked. Jesus implied this fact when He spoke of ancient people and cities. The Lord remembered Sodom (Mt. 11:23-24), a culture that existed about 1,900 years before He came to the earth. He remembered the “*Queen of the South*” (Mt. 12:42), a ruler who lived about 1000 B.C. He even remembered the Ninevites (Mt. 12:41). The Ninevites lived about 800 B.C.

**2:7-9:** *to them that by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and incorruption, eternal life: 8 but unto them that are factious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, (shall be) wrath and indignation, 9 tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that worketh evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Greek;*

Here Paul provided additional information about the coming judgment. When this time comes, some will inherit eternal life. The ones who will have access to this life will be those who were “*patient*” and were involved with “*well-doing*” (compare Gal. 6:9). Those who will be saved will be people who sought *glory, honor, incorruption, and eternal life*. Those who enter into heaven will be the ones who had heaven as their goal (verse 7). Heaven will not be a place where people “slip in.” The saved will be the ones who put time and effort into attaining eternal life. Because saved people will have expended time, money, and much effort, they will be *glorified* (more information about the glory enjoyed by the saved is found in Rom. 8:16-18 and Mt. 13:43). All of these things require “*patience*” (*hupomone*). This word is scattered throughout the New Testament, and it does not describe “passively waiting out difficult circumstances; rather, it is active, often being depicted in terms of work on behalf of the gospel or of suffering on behalf

of it” (CBL, GED, 5:383). This is what the word means in verse 7.

Patience is to be coupled with “*seeking*” (*zeteo*). This verb is used several times in the New Testament. It is applied to Herod seeking Jesus (Mt. 2:13); of seeking first the kingdom (Mt. 6:33); of a merchant seeking choice pearls (Mt. 13:45); of Jesus seeking the lost (Lk. 19:10); of seeking a mate (1 Cor. 7:27); etc. This seeking “implies far more than a mere ‘looking around’” (CBL, GED, 3:28). If people do not actively seek salvation, there is only one other place for them to go—hell.

The information in verse 8 explains why many do not seek after God and His righteousness. One sin that keeps people from God’s fellowship is “*factious*” behavior (the KJV says “*contentious*”). This word (*eritheia*) is listed as a work of the flesh in Gal. 5:20. It described people who sought and took political office for personal gain. Here it “characterizes people who are determined by selfishness also as those who do not obey the truth, are compliant toward unrighteousness, and fall under judgment because they in their stubbornness and impenitent hearts store up for themselves wrath for the day of judgment (v. 5)” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:52). Additional information about this term is in the commentary on Gal. 5:20.

The word rendered “*obey not*” (*apeitheo*) “always has God or his will as its object” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:118). Jesus used this word in Jn. 3:36 to say that those who do not obey Him will “not see life.” Here it shows that instead of obeying God and His will, the Jews obeyed “unrighteousness.”

The end of verse 8 as well as verse 9 shows that on the Day of Judgment, the unsaved will face God’s *wrath, indignation, tribulation, and anguish*. The word “*tribulation*” (*thlipsis*) means “repay someone with affliction” (Gingrich and Danker, p. 362). This payment will be “*anguish*” (*stenochoria*). This word is used only a few times in the New Testament. Thayer (p. 587) defines it as “dire calamity extreme affliction.” Instead of being denied eternal life, the lost will be sentenced to an eternal hell and it will be very painful. Verse 9 promises punishment to “every soul that works evil” (this describes anyone who sins and is unforgiven). Punishment on the Day of Judgment will come to all (Jews and Gentiles) who have not been forgiven of their sins. Paul affirmed that sin does not discriminate. Even those who have never heard of God will be condemned because of sin (2 Thess. 1:7-9).

**2:10-11:** *but glory and honor and peace to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek: 11 for there is no respect of persons with God.*

Since condemnation for sin is worldwide, God has extended salvation to everyone. No matter who a person is, *glory, honor, peace, and eternal life* can be received by anyone who “*worketh good.*” Verse 11 clearly makes this point by stating God is no “*respector of persons.*” This was an especially significant message for the Jews. Paul let them know they will not have any special privileges on the Day of Judgment.

One source (the CBL, GED, 5:355) offers a lengthy but good entry on the word translated *respect of persons* (*prosopolepsia*). “The New Testament consistently speaks of the absence of favoritism or partiality in the character of God. Positively, God has not shown favoritism to any one race, creed, or color. Both Jews and Gentiles can be recipients of God’s grace (Romans 2:11; cf. Galatians 3:28). In keeping with His lack of partiality in showing grace, God is equally just in administering judgment. Whether one is a slave or free he will have to answer to God. Wrongs and injustice will be repaid without any regard to ‘who a man thinks he is’ (see Colossians 3:25).

“Just as God does not show partiality, neither should believers. Whether people are rich or poor, powerful or weak, influential or despised, to show favoritism to one at the expense of the other is a sin (James 2:1ff.). James says such partiality often is shown to the very ones who are oppressing, cheating, and exploiting believers! To be guilty of such is to slander the Lord!”

In our day, this message is still important. Around the world there are various groups and even whole cultures that feel like they are second-class citizens because of where they live or who they are. Passages like Rom. 2:11 should tell all people they are as important to God as anyone else. This verse is even helpful in dealing with prisoners. Anyone who is a convicted felon can be told that God will love him or

her just as much as someone who is not incarcerated. The key to being accepted by God is obedience. Anyone who obeys God is given the full array of spiritual blessing and privileges.

When Paul said God is not a respecter of persons, he didn't mean God has always viewed everyone exactly the same. This book will show that in the past God picked the Jews over the Gentiles. The Levites were the only ones selected for the priesthood. Though certain people or groups received special status in the past, these verses show this is no longer true.

**2:12:** *For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without the law: and as many as have sinned under the law shall be judged by the law;*

Paul has spent a great deal of time showing the Jews and Greeks (all people) are guilty of sin. Now this thought is developed even more. Paul added that all will be judged by a standard which is appropriate for them. The first group Paul mentioned consists of sinners who were “*without the law*” (*anomos*). This word is an adverb; it is only found in this verse. Paul used it to describe the Gentiles. “The lawless person is undisciplined by law, either through ignorance or deliberate disregard” (CBL, GED, 1:289). The Gentiles were undisciplined in the sense of written law. They did not have a written code from God, but they were still guilty of sin. Since sin can only be charged to people if they have a law (Rom. 4:15; 1 Jn. 3:4), the Gentiles had a law to be obeyed but it was unwritten. Verse 12 makes this point very clear: “For as many as have sinned without the law shall also perish without the law.”

The first part of verse 12 refers to the Gentiles, and the end of this verse (as well as the information in verse 13) refers to the Jews. In 12b, we learn the Jews also had a “*law*” (their law was written). The Jews took this law and they broke it. They violated the Ten Commandments along with the other laws recorded in the Old Testament. Paul said the laws broken by the Jews will be their standard of judgment when they face God.

The Jews had a written standard which will be applied to them at the end of time. The Gentiles also had a standard but it was unwritten. On the Day of Judgment, God will use the standard that was in effect when people lived. The standard for us is the New Testament (Jn. 12:48). Using the standard which applied when people lived will insure everyone is treated fairly.

**2:13:** *for not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified:*

The Jews were accustomed to hearing Moses' law. Hearing the law was a regular part of each synagogue service, and the Jews were familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures. However, Paul made it clear that “*hearing*” (or being aware) of God's law has no value in and of itself. One may hear, know, and understand everything taught by the law, but without obedience, people cannot be justified (saved). To be saved a person must be a “*doer*” (*poiotes*) of the law. This word is also found in Jas. 1:22, 23, 25; 4:11. A good cross-reference is Jas. 2:24.

The word translated *hearers* in Rom. 2:13 (*akroates*) is only found four times in the New Testament (here, Jas. 1:22, 23, 25). In each passage the term contrasts a person who hears with someone who obeys. Under the New Testament, being a doer does not describe perfect service. Rather, it means people are living the best lives they can live. The doers of the law are imperfect people who do their best to serve God.

Being a doer of God's will is still necessary, though some act as if it is irrelevant. In the church, many sit on the pews year after year. Information is learned, knowledge is increased, but the information is never used. Little to nothing is done in service to God. Those who do nothing more than hear the word waste their lives and many opportunities. God requires us to obtain and use spiritual knowledge.

**2:14-15:** These two verses are best explained by the following diagram.

Romans 2:14-15 says *for when Gentiles that have not the law do by nature the things of the law, these, not having the law, are the law unto themselves; (15) in that they show the work of the law written in their*

*hearts, their conscience bearing witness therewith, and their thoughts one with another accusing or else excusing them*

*The Gentiles* → **did not have a law.**

*Thus, the Gentiles* → **were a law unto themselves.**

*Because the Gentiles were a law unto themselves* → **their thoughts excused or accused them.**

*Their condemnation or justification was based upon* → **the things of the law.**

The *Gentiles* did “*not have a law.*” Thus, they “*were a law unto themselves.*” What does this mean? It means God allowed the “*thoughts*” of the *Gentiles* to “*excuse or accuse them.*” The thoughts which justified or condemned these people were based on “*the things of the law.*” Those who were not Hebrews either observed basic principles of the law (thou shall not steal, murder, etc.) or they did not. The *Gentiles* did not have a *law* as such, but they were able to profit from the one given to the Jews.

The earlier material in this book showed how the Jews looked down on the *Gentiles*. Part of the reason the Jews were so hateful was that they had received written revelation from God. This revelation made them proud and prone to boasting. Paul now deals with this boasting. He smashed the Jewish pride by saying the *Gentiles* did have a law, and at least to a certain degree, it was the same law the Jews had.

Though the *Gentiles* did not have written law, they were able to abide by the “*nature*” of the law (the Law of Moses). The word *nature* (*phusis*) means “*guided by their natural sense of what is right and proper*” (Thayer, p. 660). By using their instincts, the *Gentiles* were able to fulfill the moral obligations which had been imposed upon the Jews. The *Gentiles* also had a sense of what was proper because the Jews were a recognized people, and many moral laws had existed since the time of Adam and Eve. Societies need laws to survive. It is only reasonable to believe that some of God’s laws (such as the prohibitions against murder and robbery) were accepted in all societies even though a proper knowledge of God was lost.

The knowledge the *Gentiles* had was connected to the “*conscience*” (verse 15). The conscience, which is explained more fully in the commentary on Rom. 13:5 and 1 Tim. 1:5, is a tool which helps humanity judge between right and wrong. In the case of the *Gentiles*, the conscience *excused* or *condemned* them. It appears that on the Day of Judgment some *Gentiles* will be justified or condemned based upon their conscience. The conscience, plus some knowledge of the law, will form a standard for those who lived prior to the cross. The thoughts people had and the knowledge of what they did will “*accuse/reproach or defend them*” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:272).

The human conscience is the faculty which evaluates our actions along with our thoughts, and then either approves or condemns what we have done (Bible Knowledge Commentary, p. 446). Scripture speaks of our conscience in different ways. It is referred to as being *good* (Acts 23:1); *clear* (“*void of offense,*” ASV, Acts 24:16); *evil* (Heb. 10:22); *corrupted* (“*defiled,*” ASV, Tit. 1:15); *weak* (1 Cor. 8:7); *seared* (1 Tim. 4:2); and *cleansed* (Heb. 9:14). In light of what Paul said no one can rightly affirm the *Gentiles* were without law.

**2:16:** *in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men, according to my gospel, by Jesus Christ.*

When people stand before the Lord on the Day of Judgment, Jesus will divulge the “*secrets of men.*” The deeds people have tried to hide and conceal in this life will be exposed. Sins which were kept secret in life will finally be made known. Gingrich and Danker (p. 454) say the word *secrets* (*kruptos*) means “*someone’s secret thoughts, plans, purposes.*” Thayer (p. 362) says “*the things which men conceal.*” In the Greek text this word is plural. Because all will finally be revealed, the Judgment Day will be more

interesting than any television show or movie ever made by man. At the end of time secret murders, conspiracies, thefts, unsolved crimes, hidden abuse, unknown sexual sins, hate, jealousy, and everything else people never knew about will be revealed. Important cross-references for this thought include Eccl. 12:14 and 1 Cor. 4:5 (note the word “darkness” in 1 Cor. 4).

Paul said all men will be judged “*according*” to “*his gospel*.” This expression does not mean the material in the New Testament will judge everyone from the time of Adam on. Rather, it means Paul received information (*his gospel*) that says all people will face judgment. The earlier material in this chapter explains that all will be condemned or justified based upon when they lived and what conditions or standards existed between God and man at that time.

**2:17-20:** *But if thou bearest the name of a Jew, and retest upon the law, and gloriest in God, 18 and knowest his will, and approvest the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, 19 and art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them that are in darkness, 20 a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having in the law the form of knowledge and of the truth;*

There are eight thoughts in this section of Romans two, and present tense verbs are used to express each of them. It may be helpful to highlight the different thoughts with colored pencils. This section begins by identifying the ones being discussed (the Jews). The Jews were charged with “*resting in the law*.” The word *retest* (*epanapauo*) means “*find rest, comfort, or support*” (Gingrich and Danker, p. 283). The Jews felt safe because they had the law. They trusted in the law because it had originated from God and was therefore trustworthy. They also had confidence in the law because people want something to trust in. Moses’ law met these needs and the Old Testament made the Jews feel secure. The use of the present tense shows they felt very secure.

The second charge may be described as *bragging* (“*gloriest in God*”). It is not hard to imagine what the Jews said to others—“We have a law from God. You Gentiles don’t have one. You are poor, pitiful creatures.” The Jews were able to boast that only they knew God’s will and only they were able to teach it because the law had been given to them.

The third part of the indictment is in 18a—the Jews were privileged to “*know*” God’s “*will*.” They knew about God’s plans and desires, but they failed to properly use and apply this knowledge.

The fourth accusation is described as “*approving things that are excellent*.” In other words, these people were able to clearly determine right and wrong. They knew what was good and what was bad. They had this ability and knowledge, but these things were not used. Is a similar thing true for today?

The fifth charge was based upon their “*instruction*” in the law. The Jews were taught the law from childhood (2 Tim. 3:15). Even Paul had received intense instruction about the law (Gal. 1:14), and this had been a great privilege for him. Anyone who is carefully instructed in the ways of God is greatly blessed and therefore has significant responsibilities. The Jews wanted the blessings but not the accountability and responsibility.

In verse 19, it is said the Jews were “*confident*” about several matters. Those who were members of this nation were sure they were a *guide for the blind, a light for the people who were in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, and a teacher of babes*. They believed their status, knowledge, and possession of a law put them in a position to help others.

God did expect His people to guide others and the Jews boasted about fulfilling this role. However, these boasts were lies. The Jews were just as sinful as the Gentiles. Instead of being lights, they contributed to the darkness. More will be said about this in the following paragraphs.

The word “*guide*” (*hodegos*) is only found a few times in the New Testament. The other places where it occurs are Mt. 15:14; 23:16, 24; Acts 1:16. In each passage the word is used in a literal way, but the meaning is not favorable. The word “*blind*” shows that the Jews “considered that they were the only authoritative interpreters of the Law, and as such they were the only legitimate leaders and guides of the ‘blind’ heathen” (Brown, 1:221). In 20a there are other descriptions related to teaching. The ASV uses the word “*corrector*”; the KJV says “*instructor*.” This word (*paideutes*) is found only here and Heb. 12:9. In the present passage it describes someone who had great knowledge—“the Jew who on the basis of his



knowledge of the law considers himself ‘an instructor of the foolish’” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:3). The Gentiles were “foolish” (*aphron*) “because they did not know the law” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:185). This caused the Jews to see themselves as a “teacher of babes.” The word *babes* (*nepios*) denotes spiritual immaturity—“those who do not know the true wisdom” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:465).

The seventh sin is found at the end of verse 20. The Jews based all their beliefs and ideas upon the law. They were sure “knowledge” and “truth” were in the law, and what they did and believed was right. The word “form” (*morphosis*) means Jewish teachers regarded the books of the law “as a physical representation, indeed, the actual embodiment of absolute knowledge and truth” (Kittle, 4:754). The Jews knew what they had, and this caused them to believe they were acceptable to God because their practices came from the law (or at least they made this allegation). This belief (or claim) contributed to their pride and arrogance. The final item used to charge the Jews with sin is found in verse 21.

**2:21-24:** *thou therefore that 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 rob temples? 23 thou who gloryest in the law, through thy transgression of the law dishonorest thou God? 24 For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you, even as it is written.*

The Jews “taught others.” This point is repeated in Mt. 23 where Jesus uttered a scathing rebuke against the Pharisees and Scribes. Jesus said Jewish teachers sat in *Moses’ seat*. They occupied places of influence and taught the people how to live, though the ones doing the teaching were corrupt and ungodly (see Mt 23:1-5).

In this part of Romans we learn how Jews said to Gentiles, *Let us show you how to live. We have God’s law. We can help you.* This claim was not wrong. If the Jewish offer had been true and sincere, this would have fulfilled God’s will. The Jews, however, were not living according to God’s will. Because they failed to follow the law, they were in no position to tell the Gentiles how to live. Even now, many who have a beam in their eye want to help those with a small speck (Mt. 7:3-5).

Paul’s charges did not mean the Jews were unfamiliar with their law. The Jews had a lot of knowledge about Moses’ law. They did not, however, practice what they knew. Knowing how to live and living this way are two different matters. Even now, many know what is right but fail to abide by what they know.

At the end of verse 21 and through verse 24, Paul offers specific examples concerning the Jews and their failure to apply and obey the law. The singular form of the pronoun “you” intensifies the thought.

The Jews were guilty of “stealing.” The Jews knew stealing was wrong and they condemned this act. Yet, Paul asked members of the Hebrew race, “What about **you**? *Don’t you steal?*” The implied answer is *yes*. If the Jews answered this question honestly, they could only give an affirmative answer.

In listing these sins, Paul may not have meant the Jews literally stole, committed adultery, and plundered temples. He may have been doing what Jesus did in Mt. 5:21-48. He may have meant these acts were thought about in the heart but not acted on.

The Jews also said “adultery” (*moicheuo*) was wrong (verse 22). This act was condemned because God designed marriage to be a relationship between one man and one woman. The Jews taught this to the Gentiles but they didn’t practice it. We read about this problem in Mt. 19:6-12 and Mt. 5:28.

The other sin mentioned by Paul is described as “abhorring idols.” The Jews must have severely rebuked the idolatrous Gentiles. One can only imagine how they must have said, “*You wicked people. You serve an idol. How dumb. You Gentiles are ridiculous because idols are nothing but stone and wood.*” The Jews condemned false worship but they too were guilty of improper worship. The word *abhor* (*bdelussomai*) is only used here and Rev. 21:8. Here it has the sense of *detest*.

The Jews who faulted the Gentiles for idolatry were willing to “rob temples” (the KJV says “commit sacrilege”). This expression, which is only one word in the original text (*hierosuleo*), is found only here. This seems to refer to business transactions with pagans and their temples (Jews sold property and utensils to the pagans so they could engage in idol worship). The Jews believed, “Under certain

circumstances such dealings were allowed, if they contributed to the damaging of the pagan cult. Paul seems to be rejecting such devious practices....The verse may also allude to the practice of some Jews of removing gold and silver idols from shrines for private profit” (Brown, 2:235).

Paul listed three of the sins committed by the Jews, and in each instance he used the present tense. They continually preached against stealing but continually stole themselves. They repeatedly condemned adultery while they continuously engaged in it. They regularly condemned idolatry but were themselves habitually practicing this sin. He further rubbed salt into the wound he created by affirming the Jews *gloried* in the law (verse 23). The Jews boasted (“*gloriest*”) about Moses’ law and were arrogant about their spiritual heritage. This caused Paul to ask, “Are you not guilty of dishonoring God?” In other words, “What happens when people continually disobey God’s standard and at the same time claim the law is wonderful?” The word “*dishonor*” (*atimazo*) means “treat shamefully, insult” (Gingrich and Danker, p. 120). Paul’s question forced the Jews to agree with him—their actions dishonored God to the point where He was insulted and shamefully treated. This point was very clear to Paul’s readers (verse 24).

Because the Jews were careless with God’s law, the Gentiles “*blasphemed*” (present tense) *the “name of God.”* Moses Lard (Romans, p. 95) said, “The heathen judged gods by the men who worshipped them. Good man, good god; bad man, bad god.” Bruce (p. 89) said “Members of the Qumran community were warned to be careful in their dealings with Gentiles, ‘lest they blaspheme’.” The word *blasphemed* (*blasphemeo*) is used 35 times in the New Testament. It means “slander, accuse wrongfully” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:219). The specific definition for this passage is “*be evil spoken of, reviled, railed at*” (Thayer, p. 102).

Lanier (Romans, p. 13) applies this material to our day and time. He said, “When the morals of apostate religious groups are higher than ours, we bring reproach on Christ and His church.” Furthermore, “The greatest hindrance to the spread of the gospel today is the conduct of many of its professed believers. Immorality, worldly-mindedness, dishonest dealing, and divisions hinder Christianity. Opposition from without is not what hurts the most. The right kind of living on the part of professed Christians gives them a favorable hearing when they present the gospel. Do not try to sell the gospel by mere talk; show them a sample of what the gospel will do for the people who really believe it. You will then likely make a believer instead of a blasphemer” (Whiteside, p. 62).

Wayne Jackson (Christian Courier, Vol. XXVIII, NO. 12, April 1993) said, “In A.D. 19, a public scandal occurred within the Jewish community of Rome. There was a wealthy Roman lady, Fulvia by name, who had been proselytized to the Hebrew religion. Four Jewish knaves persuaded her to donate purple and gold, which allegedly were to be used for the temple in Jerusalem. However, once the wealth was obtained, those base Hebrews used the gift for personal advantage. When Tiberius Caesar (A.D. 14-37) learned of this misdeed, he banished all Jews from Rome (Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.3.5). Of course, the Jewish people soon filtered back into the eternal city, though they were banished again in the days of Claudius (A.D. 41-54) (cf. Acts 18:2). No wonder, therefore, that Paul could charge certain Jews, who feigned a fervent relationship with the one true God, of blaspheming the holy name before the Gentiles.”

**2:25-27:** *For circumcision indeed profiteth, if thou be a doer of the law: but if thou be a transgressor of the law, thy circumcision is become uncircumcision. 26 If therefore the uncircumcision keep the ordinances of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be reckoned for circumcision? 27 and shall not the uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who with the letter and circumcision art a transgressor of the law?*

The 25<sup>th</sup> verse reminded the Jews that circumcision alone could not make them pleasing to God. This act only had value if it was accompanied by obedience to the law. If the Jews who lived under the Old Testament failed to keep the law, their “*circumcision became uncircumcision.*” This verse literally says, “If you are a lawbreaker, your circumcision has become a foreskin.” Circumcision was not a *magic shield*; the act needed to be accompanied by obedience to the laws and will of God.

When people received circumcision, they had an obligation to keep the whole law (Gal. 5:3).

Furthermore, circumcision did not exempt the Jews from sin. Anytime an accountable person breaks God's law he becomes a sinner (1 Jn. 3:4). Since the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), the Jews who sinned under the law were condemned (Rom. 2:12). A Jewish lawbreaker was therefore just as bad as a Gentile lawbreaker, even though the Jews had the covenant of circumcision (Gen. 17:12). This point was also made by Jesus in Jn. 8:34.

At the beginning of verse 25 Paul described circumcision with the word "*profit*" (*opheleo*). He used this same term in describing love (1 Cor. 13:3). The 1 Cor. 13 reference says magnificent acts of benevolence are *profitless* if they are not done with love. This is also true of circumcision. The idea that circumcision by itself was without value must have shocked the Jews. The Hebrews believed they were the special people of God and circumcision was the answer to all their problems. This belief was completely wrong. Those now living should learn from this error, but this problem still persists. Some think certain acts in Christianity (having faith, repentance, baptism, etc.) will save them. The Jews could not be saved by a certain act. The same is true for Christians. They cannot be saved by one or more acts. To be a child of God certain actions are required, but these acts must be accompanied by a godly life. For information about the word "*transgressor*" ("*breaker*," KJV), see the commentary on verse 27.

The subject of *circumcision* (*peritome*) is discussed more in the book of Romans than any other New Testament book. In Romans this term occurs for the first time in verse 25. The other instances of its occurrence in this epistle are 2:26, 27, 28, 29; 3:1, 30; 4:9, 10, 11, 12; 15:8. The CBL (Romans, p. 49) noted, "The word 'circumcision' (*peritome*) occurs 35 times in the New Testament, 15 times in Romans (6 times in this chapter) and 7 times in Galatians. Romans and Galatians give major attention to the means of salvation alike for both Jew and Gentile." The word translated *uncircumcision* "occurs 19 times in the New Testament, 10 times in Romans and 3 times in Galatians. These two words are almost exclusive to Paul's epistles" (ibid).

In verse 26 the thought is simple and hypothetical (note the word "*if*"). This statement shows that Gentiles (people who were uncircumcised, compare Eph. 2:11) could live as God wanted, and this godly living would be "*counted*" (reckoned) as *circumcision*. That is, God would look upon the Gentiles with favor and acceptance. God would not turn away the Gentiles who kept the Jewish law.

A study of verses 25-26 shows that Paul said the same thing twice, but he reversed the thought. Verse 25 speaks of Jews who did not keep the law. Those who failed to keep the law had their *circumcision* become *uncircumcision*. The Gentiles (who were not circumcised) became *circumcised* if they obeyed the Old Testament system. An example of a Gentile *out-faithing* (living better than) a Jew is found in Mt. 8:10. The Lord *marveled* at the response from a Gentile. The key to being right with God in the past and the key to being right with Him in the present is obedience. Actions such as circumcision will have no meaning when the final judgment occurs unless people are obedient (Mt. 7:21; Heb. 5:8-9).

Verse 26 has been used to belittle the value of baptism. Since the Gentiles were saved without circumcision, it has been argued that sinners can be saved without baptism. While this may appear to be a parallel matter, it is not an accurate comparison. Whiteside (Romans, p. 64) rightly notes that the Gentiles had no command or obligation to be circumcised. On the other hand, unsaved sinners are commanded to be baptized (Acts 10:48; Mk. 16:16; 1 Pet. 3:20-21). Since circumcision was an option for the Gentiles but baptism is a command, the two acts are not comparable.

The 27<sup>th</sup> verse states that on the Day of Judgment Gentiles will indict some Jews. Though the Jews had circumcision, many of them were lawbreakers. The Gentiles who abided by the law will be put forward as evidence against God's people. This evidence will condemn many Jews. On the Day of Judgment God will use righteous Gentiles to show the Jews that they too could have lived lives which pleased God. If at the end of time any Jew says, "I couldn't live that kind of life," God will be able to say, "Others did and here they are." A good parallel text is Mt. 12:41-42.

When Paul said the Jews were "*transgressors*" of the law, he used a special term (*parabates*). This word meant "stepping across the line of right into the path of wrong" (CBL, GED, 5:44). It "always occurs in connection with self-righteous, standard-conscious Jewish audiences" (ibid). For the Jews and Gentiles who lived prior to New Testament times, "the keeping and transgressing of the law determine how the roles are distributed in the final judgment" (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:14).

**2:28-29:** *For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: 29 but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.*

These two verses form the conclusion started in 2:17. Paul wanted to prove that true Jews are not identified by their outward appearance (the phylacteries, paying tithes, or being circumcised. See Rom. 9:6). True Jews are those who have a proper heart.

The end of verse 28 says true circumcision is not a physical act. Although the Jews treasured the cutting of the flesh (circumcision) as “*the act*,” this was not what really mattered in the eyes of God. If a person’s heart is not right with God, no outward act will make him acceptable. True circumcision, and being a true Jew, was and is a state of mind. It is an *inward* matter (verse 29). True circumcision is of the *heart*. The word “*inwardly*” (*kruptos*) has the sense of an inward condition (see how this same word has this same sense in 1 Pet. 3:4). The CBL, GED (6:406) rightly noted, “The notion that outward ‘appearance’ does not guarantee reality comes through in Romans 2:28.” True circumcision has always been in *spirit* instead of the *letter*. This fact is easily proven by both Testaments (see Deut. 30:6 and Col. 2:11). To understand the “*spirit versus letter*,” see 2 Cor. 3:6 and the following chart (this is adopted from Brown, 3:493).

LETTER	SPIRIT
Written on stone	Written on the heart
Written with animal sacrifices	Written with Jesus’ blood
Emphasis on law	Emphasis on freedom
Literal circumcision	Circumcision of the heart
The old way	The new way
Death	Life
From Moses and angels	From the Son of God

The final point in verse 29 struck an additional blow against the Jews who valued outward acts like circumcision. Those who were proud of external acts and rituals wanted praise from men, not God. The person who is circumcised in the heart wants “*praise*” (*epainos*) from God. Brown (3:817) says *praise* means “his saving verdict on the day of judgment.” Only “God can give this recognition” (*ibid*), and it will only be given to those who obey the gospel (Rom. 1:5; 16:26; 2 Thess. 1:7-9).

The first chapter in Romans shows that Gentiles were guilty of sin. The second chapter proves the Jews were also guilty. Because all are guilty of sin Paul is ready to present information about the *gospel*—God’s power to save the human race.