

Romans 2:12–29

May 4, 2025

¹² For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. ¹³ For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. ¹⁴ For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law.

¹⁵ They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them ¹⁶ on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

¹⁷ But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God ¹⁸ and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law; ¹⁹ and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, ²⁰ an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth— ²¹ you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? ²² You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³ You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. ²⁴ For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”

²⁵ For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. ²⁶ So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? ²⁷ Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. ²⁸ For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. ²⁹ But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

I. Introduction

Paul continues dismantling any reliance on religious privilege as a shield from God’s judgment. Here, Paul clarifies that God’s judgment is impartial and just, whether for Gentiles without the law or Jews with the law. Possession of the law is not the same as obedience to it. Paul confronts Jewish readers who trust in their status and heritage rather than true obedience and inward transformation. The passage culminates in a profound statement of true Jewish identity—not marked by outward ritual, but inward heart-change by the Spirit.

II. Exposition and Reflection

1. Law and Judgment for All (vv. 12–16)

- Gentiles, who lack the written law, are judged by the law written on their hearts; Jews are judged by the law given to them.
 - God’s judgment reaches even the secrets of our hearts—an internal standard none can escape.
 - How does the concept of conscience reinforce God's universal standards?
 - Why is it not enough to just *hear* the law?
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2. The Hypocrisy of the Religious (vv. 17–24)

- Paul rebukes Jewish hypocrisy—teaching others but not practicing what is taught.
 - The result is a tarnished witness: “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”
 - How does hypocrisy damage the reputation of God and the Church?
 - Are there ways we rely on our religious knowledge instead of personal obedience?
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3. True Circumcision is of the Heart (vv. 25–29)

- Circumcision, once a covenant marker, is meaningless without obedience.
 - True belonging to God is not about external signs but about inner renewal by the Spirit.
 - How do we sometimes confuse religious rituals with true heart change?
 - How does this passage redefine what it means to belong to God?
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Heidelberg Catechism 62

Q. Why can’t our good works be our righteousness before God, or at least a part of our righteousness?

A. Because the righteousness which can pass God’s judgment must be entirely perfect and must in every way measure up to the divine law.¹

But even our best works in this life are imperfect and stained with sin.²

¹ Rom. 3:20; Gal. 3:10 (Deut. 27:26)

² Isa. 64:6

John Gill, *Exposition on Romans 2:14*

For when the Gentiles which have not the law

The objection of the Gentiles against their condemnation, taken from their being without the law, is here obviated. The apostle owns that they had not the law, that is, the written law of Moses, and yet intimates that they had, and must have a law, against which they sinned, and so deserved punishment, and which they in part obeyed; for these men

do by nature the things contained in the law.

The matter and substance of the moral law of Moses agrees with the law and light of nature; and the Gentiles in some measure, and in some sort, did these things by nature; not that men by the mere strength of nature without the grace of God, can fulfil the law, or do anything that is acceptable to God; and indeed, what these men did was merely natural and carnal, and so unacceptable to God. Some understand this of nature assisted by grace, in converted Gentiles, whether before or after the coming of Christ; others expound the phrase, by nature, freely, willingly, in opposition to the servile spirit of the Jews, in their obedience to the law; though it rather seems to design the dictates of natural reason, by which they acted: and so

these having not the law,

the written law,

are a law to themselves;

which they have by nature and use, and which natural reason dictates to them. So Plato distinguishes the law “into written and unwritten: the written law is that which was used in commonwealths”; and that, ‘which was according to custom or nature’, was called unwritten, such as not to go to market naked, nor to be clothed with women's clothes; which things were not forbidden by any law, but these were not done because forbidden by the unwritten law;” which he calls “unwritten”, because not written on tables, or with ink; otherwise it was written in their minds, and which by nature and use they were accustomed to.

R. C. Sproul, *Romans, An Expositional Commentary*

“Paul reminds the Christians at Rome that the fact that they are circumcised does not guarantee the blessing. If they would remember Deuteronomy, the second giving of the law (Deut. 29-30), they would know that the sign of which they were

boasting was the very sign that condemned them and marked them as covenant breakers.

The same could be said for us and our sign of the new covenant, baptism. Baptism does not save anybody (nor does joining the church). Baptism is an outward sign of what God promises to do inwardly. The final analysis is not whether we are baptized outwardly but whether we are baptized inwardly. Do we possess the spiritual reality that the sign points to? That is what Paul is saying to the Jew, who was circumcised. All the people who crucified Jesus were circumcised. The Pharisees thought that because they had biological roots to Abraham, they were guaranteed salvation. Just so, there are people today who think they are guaranteed salvation because they grew up in a Christian home, were baptized, went to catechism, joined the church, and enjoy the Lord's Supper.”

Memory Verse:

Romans 3:20 (ESV)

For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

Romans 3:1–20

May 11, 2025

3 Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? ² Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.

³ What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? ⁴ By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written,

“That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged.”

⁵ But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.) ⁶ By no means! For then how could God judge the world? ⁷ But if through my lie God’s truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? ⁸ And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.

⁹ What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, ¹⁰ as it is written:

“None is righteous, no, not one;
¹¹ no one understands;
no one seeks for God.
¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;
no one does good,
not even one.”
¹³ “Their throat is an open grave;
they use their tongues to deceive.”
“The venom of asps is under their lips.”
¹⁴ “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”
¹⁵ “Their feet are swift to shed blood;
¹⁶ in their paths are ruin and misery,
¹⁷ and the way of peace they have not known.”
¹⁸ “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. ²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

I. Introduction

Paul concludes the first major section of Romans by showing the universality of sin. Whether Jew or Gentile, none are righteous in themselves. These verses contain one of the most comprehensive indictments of human sinfulness in

Scripture. Paul combines Old Testament quotations to show that sin corrupts every aspect of human nature. This prepares the reader for the good news of justification by grace through faith, which begins in the next section. Without understanding our need, we will not value the solution found in Christ.

II. Exposition and Reflection

1. The Advantage of the Jew (vv. 1–8)

- The Jews had real privileges—chiefly, the possession of God’s Word—but their failure does not nullify God’s faithfulness.
 - Paul addresses distorted logic: should we sin to make God's righteousness stand out more? Absolutely not.
 - How do we misinterpret God’s patience and grace to justify sin?
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2. The Universality of Sin (vv. 9–18)

- Paul strings together a series of quotations from Psalms and Isaiah to emphasize the total depravity of humanity—mind, will, speech, action, and relationships.
 - This is a devastating picture of life without the fear of God.
 - What does this reveal about our natural condition apart from grace?
 - How does Paul’s depiction of depravity prepare us to embrace the gospel?
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2. The Law’s Purpose (vv. 19–20)

- The law silences every excuse and shows the world guilty before God. It was never meant to justify us but to reveal our sin.
 - The knowledge of sin is a gift if it drives us to seek salvation in Christ.
 - What happens when we rely on works of the law for justification?
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Philadelphia Baptist Confession 11:1–2

Of Justification

1. Those whom God effectually calleth, he also freely justifieth, not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for anything wrought in them, or done by

them, but for Christ's sake alone; not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing Christ's active obedience unto the whole law, and passive obedience in his death for their whole and sole righteousness by faith, which faith they have not of themselves; it is the gift of God.

(Rom. 3:24, 8:30; Rom. 4:5-8; Eph. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:30, 31; Rom. 5:17-19; Phil. 3:8, 9; Eph. 2:8-10; John 1:12; Rom. 5:17)

2. Faith thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification; yet it is not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love.

(Rom. 3:28; Gal. 5:6; James 2:17, 22, 26)

Charles Spurgeon, *God Justified, Though Man Believes Not*

“The seed of Israel had great privileges even before the coming of Christ. God had promised by covenant that they should have those privileges; and they did enjoy them. They had a revelation and a light divine, while all the world beside sat in heathen darkness. Yet so many Jews did not believe, that, as a whole, the nation missed the promised blessing. A great multitude of them only saw the outward symbols, and never understood their spiritual meaning. They lived and died without the blessing promised to their fathers. Did this make the covenant of God to be void? Did this make the faithfulness of God to be a matter of question? "No, no," says Paul, "if some did not believe, and so did not gain the blessing, this was their own fault; but the covenant of God stood fast, and did not change because men were untrue." He remained just as true as ever; and he will be able to justify all that he has said, and all that he has done, and he will do so even to the end. When the great drama of human history shall have been played out, the net result will be that the ways of God shall be vindicated notwithstanding all the unbelief of men.”

David Peterson, *Romans*, Evangelical Biblical Theological Commentary

“Paul demonstrates how the failure of Jews to be true to their calling highlights the faithfulness and righteousness of God in dealing with his people. In so doing he exposes the sort of objections to the gospel he had to deal with in the course of his ministry. Paul's argument challenges those who want to avoid any sense of

accountability to God or who use clever arguments to justify their hypocrisy and unbelief. Biblical revelation was given to expose sin, not to provide a means of self-justification. By bringing condemnation to Israel first and then to the nations, the law testified to the need of all for the manifestation of the righteousness of God in the saving work of the Messiah (3:21-31). In today's world people continue to ignore God and the challenge of the gospel. Some see no need to rely on God's merciful provision in Jesus Christ because of their own beliefs and achievements. Such false confidence may be based on religious activity that is divorced from a genuine relationship with God. Others distort the gospel and claim immunity from judgment because of a simplistic view of the love of God. Many use deceptive moral and intellectual arguments to challenge the truthfulness of the Christian position, to malign believers, and to justify their own unbelief and rebellion against God. Paul's use of Scripture in this passage invites us to examine the depths of sin in our own lives, to challenge the superficial and self-serving views of unbelievers, and to demonstrate the universal need for the gospel of grace.”

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