

## ROMANS (2.17-3.8)

**Rom. 2:17** But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God <sup>18</sup> and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law; <sup>19</sup> and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, <sup>20</sup> an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth— <sup>21</sup> you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? <sup>22</sup> You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? <sup>23</sup> You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. <sup>24</sup> For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”

**Rom. 2:25** For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. <sup>26</sup> So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? <sup>27</sup> Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. <sup>28</sup> For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. <sup>29</sup> 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.

**Rom. 3:1** Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? <sup>2</sup> Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. <sup>3</sup> What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? <sup>4</sup> 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.”

**Rom. 3:5** 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.) <sup>6</sup> By no means! For then how could God judge the world? <sup>7</sup> But if through my lie God’s truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? <sup>8</sup> And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.

### A Knowing vs. doing. (2.17-24)

### B External rite vs. heart obedience (2.25-29)

### C Jewish unfaithfulness vs. God’s faithfulness (3.1-4)

### D Our lie vs. God’s truth (3.5-8)

## ROMANS (2.17-3.8)

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.<sup>1</sup>

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?”

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....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.

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**.

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).

3.3-4 Though some Jews did not believe or were unfaithful (evidenced by their sinful conduct mentioned in 2:21–23, 25), God remains faithful to His Word (cf. Deut. 7:9; 1 Cor. 1:9; Heb. 10:23; 11:11; 1 Peter 4:19). This concept of God’s faithfulness in spite of Israel’s unbelief is developed more fully in Romans 9–11.

Whenever a follower of Christ feels superior, he should beware, for such an attitude is not a sign of God’s grace. To come into a position of spiritual privilege only to succumb to self-righteous arrogance indicates that one’s soul is in great danger. Our familiarity with holy things must never give way to spiritual presumption.<sup>2</sup>

Nathan solemnly told David, “... by doing this you have made the enemies of the Lord show utter contempt” (2 Samuel 12:14).

There is another danger, a natural twin to the danger of thinking we are acceptable to God because we have the truth: namely, thinking we are right before the Lord because we are affiliated with his people. The Jews supposed they were secure because they were part of God’s chosen people through circumcision. They believed circumcision somehow secured salvation. Rabbi Menachem, in his commentary on the Book of Moses, wrote, “Our Rabbis have said that no circumcised man will see Hell.” Another said, “Circumcision saves from Hell.” The midrash Tillim says, “God swore to Abraham that no one who was circumcised should be sent to Hell.”

We all need to go to the heart of the matter. The Old Testament recognized that circumcision was a matter of the heart. Moses said to his people,

“The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.” (Deuteronomy 30:6)

Jeremiah exhorted his people to deal with their hearts saying, “Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, circumcise your hearts” (Jeremiah 4:4a). The New Testament also describes a true believer in terms of inner circumcision:

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ. (Colossians 2:9–11)

The use of this word-group in the NT is almost exclusively Pauline.<sup>1</sup> For Paul there is a right boasting in God (5:11: it is here also through Christ); in Christ (Phil 3:3); in the hope of the glory of God (5:2); in the cross of Christ (Gal 6:14); in tribulations (5:3)—not as something meritorious on the part of those who suffer them but as part of the discipline by which God teaches them to wait patiently for His deliverance; in weaknesses (2 Cor 12:5, 9: cf. 11:30)—because it is in the context of His servants’ weakness that Christ’s power is manifested; and in the faith of one’s fellow Christians and the success of the apostolic mission seen as resulting from the work of Christ or of God (15:17f; 2 Cor 7:4, 14; 8:24; 9:2f). But all boasting which is essentially a boasting in

<sup>1</sup> Witmer, J. A. (1985). [Romans](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 446). Victor Books.

<sup>2</sup> Hughes, R. K. (1991). [Romans: righteousness from heaven](#) (p. 65). Crossway Books.

## ROMANS (2.17-3.8)

man, in flesh, is illegitimate (1 Cor 1:29; 3:21; 4:7; 2 Cor 5:12b). Specially to be noted is the use of καύησις in 3:27 of the act of asserting a claim on God on the ground of one's works, of claiming to have put God in one's debt, and of καύημα in 4:2 to denote such a claim upon God.<sup>3</sup> The use of this word-group in the NT is almost exclusively Pauline.<sup>1</sup> For Paul there is a right boasting in God (5:11: it is here also through Christ); in Christ (Phil 3:3); in the hope of the glory of God (5:2); in the cross of Christ (Gal 6:14); in tribulations (5:3)—not as something meritorious on the part of those who suffer them but as part of the discipline by which God teaches them to wait patiently for His deliverance; in weaknesses (2 Cor 12:5, 9: cf. 11:30)—because it is in the context of His servants' weakness that Christ's power is manifested; and in the faith of one's fellow Christians and the success of the apostolic mission seen as resulting from the work of Christ or of God (15:17f; 2 Cor 7:4, 14; 8:24; 9:2f). But all boasting which is essentially a boasting in man, in flesh, is illegitimate (1 Cor 1:29; 3:21; 4:7; 2 Cor 5:12b). Specially to be noted is the use of καύησις in 3:27 of the act of asserting a claim on God on the ground of one's works, of claiming to have put God in one's debt, and of καύημα in 4:2 to denote such a claim upon God.

It seems on the whole better to explain μοιχεύεις simply along the lines suggested by Mt 5:27–32 than to see here also a reference to adultery in the religious sense (Hos 1–3; Jer 3; Ezek 16, etc.).

**τὸν νόμον τελοῦσα.** For τελεῖν used of fulfilling the law compare Jas 2:8: Paul nowhere else uses it in this connexion (the nearest approach to a parallel to this use of the verb in the Pauline epistles would seem to be Gal 5:16). τὸν νόμον τελεῖν must clearly have the same general sense as τὰ δικαιώματα τοῦ νόμου φυλάσσειν in v. 26, and it is probable that τελεῖν is here used simply as a synonym of φυλάσσειν.

The idea of circumcision of the heart is one that goes back to Deuteronomy (cf. Lev 26:41; Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4; 9:26). Paul further defines this circumcision as ἐν πνεύματι οὐ γράμματι. By this he most probably intends to indicate that the circumcision of the heart is not accomplished by the mere fulfilment of the letter of the law's requirement, but is a miracle, the work of God's Spirit.

3.3 The sense of the verse as a whole is that it is unthinkable that God's faithfulness to His covenant with Israel should be rendered ineffective even by the Jews' unbelief.

...we prefer to relate vv. 17–29 to the argument of vv. 1–16 more broadly. Paul's main point in 2:1–16 is that, because Jews will be assessed by God in the judgment on the same basis as Gentiles (works, doing "the law"), they cannot assume, any more than Gentiles, that they will escape God's wrath (2:4). Paul is, however, well aware that his argument ignores a crucial matter: the Jews' claim to possess a status by virtue of the covenant that puts them in a position entirely different from that of the Gentiles. In vv. 17–29, Paul takes up this matter.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Cranfield, C. E. B. (2004). *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (p. 165). T&T Clark International.

<sup>4</sup> Moo, D. J. (1996). *The Epistle to the Romans* (p. 157). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.