

• LESSON 5 (May 11) •

Romans 2:11-29

God Shows No Partiality

If God shows “no partiality” (2:11), what about the fact that the Jews had a God-given law delivered through Moses and the Gentiles did not? Later in this same letter to the Romans, Paul will write of his Jewish “kinsmen according to the flesh”:

They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen. (9:3-5)

Are Jews, then, not superior to Gentiles? Or, on the flipside, “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (1:18), but why would Gentiles be subject to this wrath? How can the assertion that God shows no partiality be true?

Paul addresses both people-groups and describes both as sinners in Romans 2:12:

- All who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law.
- All who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.

Take a moment to carefully think through the distinction between these people-groups. Both are described as sinners, but why? In what way are they both accountable to their Creator, but for different reasons?

- ❖ Gentiles who were not given the law of Moses -
- ❖ Jews who were expected, as recipients of the law of Moses, to meet the requirements of that law -



In your own words, what does it mean to be “under the law”?

Can you illustrate the principle of being “under the law” with a modern-day application?

How vitally important for descendants of Abraham to understand, “it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified” (2:13).

- As a Jew, I am a physical descendant of the people-group which received the law, but that does not mean that my genealogy justifies me before God.
- As a Jew, I may have been raised with a knowledge of the history of the Hebrews and an understanding of the essence of the law, but mere knowledge will not justify me before God.
- As a Jew, I may be an expert in the finer points of the law, tithing even my mint and dill and cumin (Matt 23:23), but if I neglect the weightier matters of the law—justice and mercy and faithfulness—I will not be justified before God.

There is one, and only one way to be justified by the law.
Consider:

For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. (Rom 3:20)

By works of the law no one will be justified. (Gal 2:16)

For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.” (Gal 3:10-12)

You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. (Gal 5:4)

What, then, is the one and only way to be justified by the law?

What problem does this pose for each and every Jew?

What is the fundamental difference between a hearer of the law and a doer of the law?

Why is God so concerned that hearers of the law be doers of the law?

What does Paul mean in Romans 3:20 that “through the law comes knowledge of sin”?

Why would Paul write that “the law is not of faith” in Galatians 3:12?

Does this mean that the Gentiles are unaccountable to God for their ungodly and unrighteous conduct?

For when Gentiles, who do have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. 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 on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus. (2:14-16)

But Jews, especially, ought to know better! Paul lists the sort of things a physical descendant of Abraham might boast in:

- You call yourself a Jew
- You rely on the law
- You boast in God
- You know his will
- You approve what is excellent
- You are instructed from the law
- You are sure that you yourself are:
 - A guide to the blind
 - A light to those who are in darkness
 - An instructor of the foolish
 - A teacher of children
- You have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth

But, to borrow the words of Jesus from Luke 12:48, “Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they demand the more.”

You then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. (Rom 2:21-23)

In what way are Gentiles “a law to themselves”?

Why would Paul write that “the work of the law is written on [Gentile] hearts”?

Do we continue to see “the work of the law” written on the hearts of people today? If so, in what way?

Can you think of other New Testament passages where we see a Jewish sense of superiority toward Gentiles?

As a result, just as was true in the days of Isaiah (52:5),
“The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles”
because of the heirs of Abraham.

A Jew might respond, “But surely my circumcision counts
for something!” Undoubtedly, circumcision had its place in
God’s plan for the Jews in the age of the Old Testament.

- It was a physical sign of God’s covenant with
Abraham and his offspring (Gen 17:9-14).
- Male children were always circumcised, in
accordance with the law, seven days after their
birth (Lev 12:1-3).

As a result, over the course of time, a great many Jews had
come to believe that if they were circumcised, they could
rest assured in their relationship with God and their
superiority to the other races. In the words of Rabbi Levi:

In the world to come Abraham will sit in the entrance to
Gehenna, and permit no Jew to descend therein. What
then will he do to those who have sinned very much?
He will remove the foreskin from babes who died before
circumcision and set it upon them and then let them
descend into Gehenna. (Gen. Rab. 48:8).

But what about the heart? Even in the Old Testament:

“Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be
no longer stubborn. For the LORD your God is God of
gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the
awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe.”
(Deut 10:16-17)

“Circumcise yourselves to the LORD; remove the
foreskin of your hearts, O men of Judah and inhabitants
of Jerusalem; lest my wrath go forth like fire, and burn
with none to quench it, because of the evil of your
deeds.” (Jer 4:4)

It is no coincidence, then, that Stephen describes the
Jewish elders and scribes of his own day in the way that he
does.

Does God’s name
continue to be
blasphemed among
unbelievers because of
the conduct of his
children? Why?

What did God mean
when he called for his
people to “circumcise
the foreskin of their
hearts”?

"You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you." (Acts 7:51)

All of which leads Paul to reason as he does in Romans 2:25-27.

For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law.

Take a moment to carefully reflect on Paul's reasoning. What major point is he trying to get his Jewish brethren to understand?

Finally, in Romans 2:28-29, Paul establishes this foundational principle.

For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. 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.

CLOSING THOUGHT: What is God looking for from both Jew and Gentile? The obedience of faith! In Christ Jesus, Gentiles and Jews can be "sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (Gal 3:26-29)

What did Paul mean when he warned, "if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision"?

To expand on Paul's point in Romans 2:28-29, what does it mean to be a Jew "inwardly"?

How does one come to be a Jew "inwardly"?