

Main Street

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



Romans 2:12-24

“You’re The Only Bible Some Will Ever Read”

July 24, 2016
(10th Sunday After Pentecost)

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“Following Christ From City Center!”

IIB: ROMANS 2:12-24
"YOU'RE THE ONLY BIBLE SOME WILL EVER READ"

2 Groups: Jew/Non-Jew Gentile On Same Footing

B. 2:12-24 ALL UNDER THE LAW: WRITTEN ON STONE, WRITTEN IN HEARTS.

Some Misuse This Passage To Argue For Salvation Apart From Christ

Future **1) 2:12-16 The Law And Witness Of Conscience In The Gentiles.** **More On Impartiality (2:1-11)**
Law (16x), Marks Disobedience // 1 Cor. 9:20-21, 613 Commandments

a) vv.12-13 God's Future Judgment: Global Thesis + Reason, For (2x). **No Partiality Restated, /Thesis**
 12a 1 *For* all who have sinned without the **law/** **Whole Mosaic Law, *Perish* = Ruin For Those Not In Line With God's Will**
 2 will also perish without the **law,** **Jn. 3:16, Gentile/Jew (v.12) // Gentile (vv.14-16)/Jew(vv.17-24), a-b//a'-b'**
 b 1' and all who have sinned under the **law/** ***Sin* = Rupture Of A Relationship By One Party, Not Just Moral Failure**
 2' will be **JUDGED** by the **law.** **GOD IS IMPARTIAL, JUDGES DEEDS, Dt. 10:17-18, Jub. 5:13, Wis. 6:7**

Impartiality, Both Jews And Gentiles Sin, Judged Differently, Gift Not Protect, v.6//v.13

13a 1 *For* it is not the hearers of the **law** **Acts 15:21, James 1:22-25, Mt. 7:24-27, Lev. 18:5, *m. Abot.* 1:7, Reason: *For***
 b 2 who are righteous before God, **//Dt. 27:26, *Righteous* = In A Right Covenant Relationship**
 c 1 but the doers of the **law** **Jew/Gentile, Hear + Do = Obedience = In A Right Covenant Relationship**
 d 2' who will be justified (counted righteous). **//3:20, Saved By Faith/Trust; Judged By Works; Acceptance By God**
vv.14-15 = Parenthesis/Footnote? 1) Principle Applied To Gentiles

Present **b) v.14a-c Example: The Gentiles Who Have Not The Law But Obey It In Their Hearts.**

14a 1 [*For* when Gentiles who have not the law **//1:32, Clear Instances, How Explain? Tension With 1:18-32?**
 b 2 *by nature* do/ what the **law** requires, **Get It Right On Occasion, 4 Ezra 3:36, Stoic Thought On Reason**
 c 3 they are a **law** to themselves; **Philo Abr. 276, God Is At Work Beyond Our Borders**
True Moral Agents, What Is Conscience Working On? Law Written Within

Present **b') vv.14d-15 Example: The Dual Witness Of The Law And Conscience: Internal Debate.**

d 1' even though they do not have the law, **Special Revelation, Jewish Law = *Torah, Commandments***
 15a 2' they show that what the **law** requires/ is written in their hearts, **Is. 51:7, Jer. 31:33, Law On The Disk**
 b 3' while their conscience also bears witness ***legal terms, [i.e. the law written in hearts]***
 c and their conflicting thoughts *accuse* or perhaps *excuse* them,] **Inward Reasonings //1:32**
Intuition + Moral Reasoning & Inner Conflict Are A Witness To God's Law

Future **a') v.16 God's Future Judgment: Jesus Christ As Mediator.** **Only Reference To Christ In 1:18-2:16**

16a on that day when, according to my gospel, **//2:13-14, 2:3, Paul's Message, Judged By Moral Light They Had**
 b God **JUDGES** the secrets of men's hearts by Jesus Christ. **1:2-4, Jn. 5:22, 2 Thess. 2:8, Mk. 4:22, Laid Bare, 1 En. 49:4**
Jesus As Mediator: 2 Cor. 5:10, Mt. 25:31-46, Jn. 5:28-29, Acts 17:31 et. al.

2) vv.17-24 Five Questions On Jewish Religious Integrity/ Scripture Quotation, Indictment.

If/Then Argument Form, Principle Applied To Jews, Paul's Own History!

a. vv.17-18 Five Basic Jewish Privileges: Insiders To The Divine Will/Light. **3 Sets/ 5 Elements/Law**

17a 1 *But if* (since) *you* (sg.) call yourself a Jew **(Yes!) //1:28-29, Return To Diatribe/Catena, Imaginary Teacher Grilled**
 b 2 and rely (lean) upon the **LAW** **Mic. 3:11, 2 Baruch 48:22-24, 2 Pairs (v.17b,c; 19a,b) + Law**
 c 3 and **BOAST** of your relation to God, **Ps. Sol. 17:1, Jer. 9:23-24, Exempt From Impartial Judgment?**

18a 4 and know the will (i.e. of God) **Long Protasis, vv.17-20 + Apodosis, v.21ff, 10 Marks!**
 b 5 and approve (discern) what is excellent, because you are instructed in **the law;** **Mt. 23:23**
Not Negative On Judaism, vv.17-20 Are True

b. vv.19-20 Five Supposed Benefits/Mission To Others: Gentile Outsiders. **To Rely On Law**

19a 1 *and if* (since) *you* are sure that you are a guide to the blind, **(Yes!) Gen. 12:1-3, Is. 2:1-4, Is. 42:6-8, Mt. 23:16, 24**
 b 2 a light to those who are in darkness **Wis. Sol. 18:4, Jewish Missionary Preacher**
 20a 3 a corrector of the foolish, **Bereft Of Law, Wis. 12:24, 15:14, Gentiles Are Foolish/Childish**
 b 4 a teacher of children, **1 En. 105:1, 2 Pairs (v.19a,b; 20a,b) + Law**
 c 5 having the embodiment of knowledge and truth in **the law;** **Wisdom, Law Is Good/True/Holy**
Paul Springs Rhetorical Trap, vv.21-24, //O.T. Prophets

c. vv.21-24 The Credibility Gap: Five Questions On Doing. **No Jewish Superiority For Possessing Law**

21a 1 therefore (*oun*), you who teach others, will you not teach yourself? **//v.20a,b, Decalogue, Critique Idolatry/Immorality**
 b 2 While you preach against stealing, do you steal? **Yes! What Law Forbids: Steal, Infidelity, Idolatry, Ex. 20:15**
 22a 3 You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? **Obedience Lacking! Ps. Sol. 8:12, Ex. 20:14**
 b 4 You who abhor idols, do you commit sacrilege (rob temples: buy stolen artifacts?)? **Mal. 3:8, Ex. 20:2-3, Ps. Sol. 8:11**
 23 5 You who **BOAST** in the **LAW,** do you dishonor God by breaking the **law?** **Yes! Contradiction! //v.17c, Is. 52:5**

Failed As A Light To The Nations (Is. 49:6), Paul Is Not Anti-Jewish But Pro-Integrity

24 *For*, as it is written, **Is. 52:5, LXX, //Ezek. 36:20, Jewish Self-Critique (Jer. 7:9, Mal. 3:8-9, Hos. 1-3, Jer. 3:8)**
 "The name of God is blasphemed *among the Gentiles because of you.*" **LXX Additions, Some Jews Give God A Bad Name**

A Brief Treatment Of IIB1,2, Romans 2:12-16, 17-24

Romans 2:12-16, 17-24 is part of a section (2:12-3:20) arranged in a four member step format: 1) vv.12-16 (law), 2) vv.17-24 (Series of 5 + Scripture) // 1' vv.25-20 (circumcision), 2') 3:1-20 (Series of 5 + Scripture). Two marks of Jewish identity (law, circumcision) are at the center of Paul's concern. The classic Jewish markers are of no use if God is not obeyed. The surface structure of the first thought unit (IIB1. 2:12-16) is a 4:2 concentric pattern (a. vv.12-13 [future], b. v.14a-c [present] // b' vv.14d-15 [present], a' v.16 [future]) with *judged* (v.12d) // *judges* (v.16b) as a verbal bracket. Three uses of *for* (Gk. *gar*) mark the unfolding argument (vv.12a, 13a, 14a). Fourteen uses of *law* tie the verses together (v.12 [4x], v.13[2x], v.14 [5x], v.18b, v.20c, v.23a). Since v.13 bridges seamlessly to v.16, “For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law will be justified... on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men's hearts by Jesus Christ,” vv.14-15 is a parenthesis explaining how Gentiles who have *sinned without the law*— and may be in some sense *doers of the law*— stand equal with Jews before God at the judgment where only deeds of trust and faith matter.

Paul begins v.12 with a thesis that supports the conclusion of the previous unit that God is impartial (v.11), thus his use of *For*. In two parallel couplets (v.12a/v.12b) Paul asserts that Gentiles who sin without the Mosaic law and Jews who sin with it will be judged and perish. Though the privilege differs, judgment does not. God is impartial. The reason is then given in v.13 (*For*), the conviction being that God is not satisfied with a mere *hearing the law* but only with *doers of the law*. Obedience is from the heart through action; to be rightly related in a covenant with God is to obey his commands. Having the law is a great privilege, but no protection against judgment. So at this point a question emerges, How can the Gentiles have hope if they have not the law of Moses to know what obedience means? Paul's answer in v.14 consists of two parts (b. v.14a-c // b. 14d-15), each with three lines in parallel: 1. *who have not the law* // 1' *do not have the law*, 2. *by nature do what the law requires* // 2' *show that what the law requires is written in their hearts*, 3. *are a law to themselves* // *conscience* debates the law within. Paul is not arguing there are righteous Gentiles, but that some regularly— from time to time— obey the moral knowledge planted within as their conscience debates right and wrong. Conscience is an internal organ of discernment with one of its resources being an intrinsic sense of right and wrong. Even without the Mosaic law, Gentiles know enough of God to obey occasionally and are therefore accountable. At the last Jesus— who came and died and rose for all— will inspect every heart (v.16). Truth will out, and the effects of grace— or the lack— will be determinative. With no change, we perish. To know is in order to do

The second paragraph (2:17-24) shifts to second person and a fresh use of diatribe. It falls into three parts (a. vv.17-18, b. vv.19-20, c' vv.21-23 + 24), each of which is built on five phrases or questions. Inclusions are *law* (v.17b/v.23a), *boast* (v.17c/v.23a). The first two parts are conditional (protasis: *But if*, v.17a; *And if*, v.19a), the third the conclusion (apodosis: *Therefore*, v.21a). The thought unit ends in v.24 with a climactic verse from Is. 52:5 (LXX) as an indictment against God's people for reducing God's fame among the Gentiles by their disobedience to what they profess. The credibility gap hurts evangelism. If the core of the previous paragraph highlights Gentiles, this one highlights Jewish privilege and mission. Note the four pairs of phrases: *rely on the law* // *boast of our relation to God* (v.17b-c), *know the will of God* // *discern what is excellent* (v.18), *guide to the blind* // *light to those in darkness* (v.19), *corrector of the foolish* // *teacher of children* (v.20). Note how each part ends with a reference to *the law* (vv.18b, 19c, 23). Also how the central three of five questions invoke the Ten Commandments (vv.21b-22a). The gap between privilege and performance is a shame. Can anyone keep the law? Do any have integrity? The answer to the question of v.23 is Yes. God's people fail.

YOU'RE THE ONLY BIBLE SOME WILL EVER READ¹

“The name of the Gentiles is blasphemed because of you.”

The high cost of hypocrisy to evangelism.

R O M A N S 2 : 2 4 b

You don't normally think of *Gentleman's Quarterly*— or GQ as it's now known— as a tool of Christian witness. It's mainly about six-pack abs, men's fashion, beautiful young females, fast cars, adventure and sports stuff. GQ is under-fifty testosterone with an MBA, a Ferrari, and season tickets for an NFL or NBA team. It's a male envy magazine and not quite as highbrow as its older brother *Esquire* or as lowbrow cousin *Maxim*. But the January issue contained an article with the surprising title, “What Would A Cool Jesus Do?”² It's a long article by Taffy Akner, a non-practicing Jew, and it's about Pastor Carl Lentz of the Hillsong Church in New York City. As if still surprised by her encounter with a Christian pastor she actually liked, she wrote:

“And here I have to say out loud how much I like Carl.... I like him even though he is ideologically opposed to things that are important to me.... He is so worried for my soul, and this should annoy me, but instead it touches me, because maybe I'm worried about my soul too, and Carl wants so badly for me to enjoy heaven with him. How can I fault someone who is more sincere about this one thing than I have ever been about anything in my life? But on the other hand,

¹ For an article on this slogan, go to www.dictionaryofchristianese.com/you-are-the-only-bible-someone-might-read.

² www.gq.com/story/inside-hillsong-church-of-justin-bieber-kevin-durant.

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if there's one thing that's true about Christianity, it's that no matter its cultural expression, it's still afraid for your soul, it still thinks you're in for a reckoning. It's still Christianity. Christianity's whole jam is remaining Christian.”

After attending worship at Hillsong for several weeks, Taffy explained that she didn't go to church but instead:

“I went to soccer games with my children, ordered a pizza, and at the end of the evening cleaned the kitchen and bent down to place dinner plates in the dishwasher, and as I did I hummed Hillsong's music. Then I straightened up suddenly, looked out the window into the dark nothing and *I realized I missed them all very much.*”

And that is what we want, “I realized I missed them all very much.” For relaxed, honest relationships across barriers to be used by the Holy Spirit to stir new hungers in people for which Jesus Christ and his people are meal. For people to experience his presence through us and miss it when we're not around. A scratch to their new itch. A cool drink to a thirsty soul.

We are to live and love in such a way it makes people curious about the One we claim to know and follow. And it most often starts with a relationship, a friendship at work or some other neutral place apart from the church. They sense you're different and start to watch you closely. And the less of a gap there is between what you believe and how you actually live- though most observers are remarkably tolerant- the more credibility you'll have with them. Not an artificial fake religiosity but a robust engagement with the whole of life that has the smell of Jesus all over it. Outsiders want to know about what we think about the things that are important to them, and many of them are coming out of tough situations. And if what you say and how you live is closely correlated with what you believe, you in effect become God's Word to them, a living, accessible first page of Scripture. Later they may read the Book and meet its author between the lines, but at this point you are their Bible. Thus the title, “You're The Only Bible Some Will Ever Read.”

The earliest reference I can find to a form of this slogan is an 1898 remark

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of a Dr. Christlieb who said, “Christian life is the only Bible that the world will read.”³ But by 1921 an enterprising soul turned the idea into a poem:

“We are the only Bible/ The careless world will read;/
We are the sinner’s gospel,/ We are the scoffer’s creed;/
We are the Lord’s last message,/ Given in deed and word;/
What if the type is crooked?/ What if the print is blurred?/
What if our hands are busy/ With other work than his?”⁴

Perhaps the best formulation is that of the late John Stott in his commentary on Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount:

“There are people in the world who never open a Bible. Still, they are forming impressions about God every time they meet a Christian. You may be the only Bible that someone will read.”⁵

If there is a key to the kingdom expanding through us at Main Street, the strategy is not complicated, though it is demanding. Who within your work or neighborhood or book club or sport’s league or family is not a Jesus follower at the present time? Do you care about their soul as Pastor Carl Lentz did for his GQ interviewer? If so, then pray for them. Look for openings to love and serve, and then when you get a cue from the Holy Spirit– which may come as a nudge within or a question from them– share your faith in Jesus as simply as you can, then ask, “Any questions?” Our good news starts with a simple offer to let Jesus heal your relationship with God. Jesus is a soul doctor.

I can’t reach the people God’s assigned to you; that’s your mission field. I will coach you if asked, but I can’t do it for you. Over time they may be interested in meeting your Christian friends, reading a book, or going to a group to get more information and watch how others of Jesus’ faulty followers live

³ See footnote No. 1.

⁴ Flint, “Hands and Feet for Him” *Moody Bible Institute Monthly* XXI (April, 1921), 377.

⁵ Downer’s Grove, ILL: IVP, 1978, 14.

their lives. And it is this relational learning that most often comes first.

People sometimes come to faith in Jesus in a white-hot blaze of glory, and I'm grateful for sudden interruptions, but most often it's a drawn out process of the Holy Spirit building a customized case that life is better with Jesus through those who are already his followers. And piece by piece he makes himself known. In me they see one aspect of his character and through you another till his outline becomes clear. He called it *salt* because it preserves and makes life tasty; he called it *light* because just as the moon reflects the light of the sun into the dark of night, we are little mirrors of Jesus set at forty-five degrees to reflect God's love into the world and the world's pain and hopes back to God in prayer.⁶ So to his disciples, and with a view to their extension of his mission, he announced, "You are the salt of the earth; you are the light of the world."⁷ If Jesus had been a 19th century American Protestant, he might have said, "You're the only Bible some will ever read." Sheldon Vanauken put it this way;

"The best argument for Christianity is Christians: their joy, their certainty, their completeness. But the strongest argument against Christianity is also Christians— when they are sombre and joyless, when they are self-righteous and smug in complacent consecration, when they are narrow and repressive, then Christianity dies a thousand deaths."⁸

And the negative side of this insight is precisely where Paul lands at the end of our second paragraph, when he indicts his hypothetical Jewish friend on the charge of hypocrisy, quoting Isaiah 52:5 from the Greek Bible, "For it is written, 'The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.'"⁹

⁶ A favorite image of N.T. Wright.

⁷ Matthew 5:13.

⁸ www.goodreads.com/quotes/179947.

⁹ For an analysis of the MT of Is. 52:5, the LXX, and Paul's own spin on the quote, see Arland J. Hultgren, *Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 128-129.

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In other words, if there's too big a gap between what you believe and how you're currently living, between your talk and your walk, it gives God a bad name and so makes my case for the God you're not following that much harder! On honest days I ask, "What kind of product is our Christian factory producing?" and my answer is, "We need some help with quality control!"

In our current culture of nearly-blind individualism, thinking of ourselves first and only, many have lost the logical linkage between private behavior and public consequences. And for Christians this is problematic since you—whether you like it or not—represent Christ and his church wherever you are, as our fourth membership vows states, "According to the grace given you, will you remain faithful members of Christ's holy Church *and serve as Christ's representatives in the world?*"¹⁰ It means people judge him and us by you. And if you just felt a load land on your shoulders, then good. It's part of the deal.

Now sometimes it's my unpleasant job to instruct the forgetful in the linkage between private actions and public consequences. Two pointed instances from the last several years come to mind, one a young woman, the other a young man. The first came for help with a power bill. Dressed nicely, nails done, an I-Phone that kept going off, three different children by three different men, not married to any of the fathers. What was I to say after listening to her story as to why we were her last and only hope? I had several choices. First, "The cost of your hairdo would pay your bill." Secondly, "Why are you begging from us instead of going to your church for aid?" I think I knew the answer; she was already on probation there, and when I asked would not give me her pastor's name. And thirdly- and most pointedly, "Why is it that every time you get a new boy friend, I have to write a check. Madame, your romances are draining the public treasury. Where's your sense of citizenship? We're are so glad you are pro-life, so how about a little pro-responsibility?"

Sometimes I'm Jesus, sometimes I'm Paul, sometimes I'm a father welcoming a prodigal or a counselor offering insight; sometimes I'm Moses carrying the commandments down from Mt. Sinai like Charlton Heston in holy zeal, and sometimes I'm just mad at human stupidity and sin and the

¹⁰ *U.M. Hymnal*: 34.

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misbehaviors of our own people. My office is a merciful place. I'm a friend of sinners because I am one, but mercy sometimes mean confrontation, as when Paul called his rabbi friend to public account, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles *because of you.*"

The second case was a church member who loved *Weed*. I listened to his silly arguments for legalization, offered a recent medical journal article on its devastating effects on children and teens in Colorado,¹¹ but he wasn't interested in evidence. In desperation I leaned in, "Why are you corrupting our community? Why are you breaking the law? Why are you aiding a criminal enterprise? Why are you making it harder for me to win people to Christ? Why are you giving God a bad name since you're on our church rolls?"

He looked stunned. The idea of the public impact of supposedly-private behavior had never crossed his mind. And when I saw the light come on, I pressed my case, "You may want to consider changing your last name or voluntarily resigning from the church so that when you're caught, it doesn't smear us as well. Or, you could stop smoking dope, grow up and become a Christian man because Jesus is still interested in you, as I am. Which will it be?" When he found me, I was a big a mess as you are, so I can help, but if you continue I hope you get caught. But be encouraged; I do jail ministry."

Not all altar calls happen at revivals. The tough ones are face to face. Your lawyer, your doctor, your banker, your pastor and your friend are best when honest. Now these are dramatic examples, and hopefully both memorable and rare, but the fact remains that if you are a Christian or church member, people are watching, and what are they seeing and hearing? Does your life aid or hurt the cause? And it's not about some hyper-neurotic performance anxiety; it's having an up-to-date relationship with Jesus so that gap between what you believe and how you behave does not continue to widen to the crisis point, and when I give him access to the whole of life, inner and outer, I receive frequent mid-course corrections and warnings. "Watch this. Do this. Don't do that," a

¹¹ George Sam Wang, MD; Genie Roosevelt, MD; Kennon Heard, MD, "Pediatric Marijuana Exposures in a Medical Marijuana State," *JAMA Pediatrics*, 2013;167 (7): 630-633.

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kid of spiritual GPS monitored by the Holy Spirit through a human conscience informed by Scripture. I like living on a short string because when I see a colleague crash and burn, there are casualties all around. Jesus is not a distant ideal; he is a present living companion, and you can learn his voice.¹²

Now, let's be honest. There will always be a gap between belief and behavior and thus a measure of hypocrisy in us all, and it is the saints, our Christian hall-of-famers, who know this best because the closer you walk with Christ the more you know the unpleasant truth about yourself. If the Pope is a humble man as well as an engaging and infectious lover of Christ, it's not because he's faking it or consulting focus groups; it's because of his long and abiding friendship with Jesus. We are frail people; we remain subject to the powers of sin and evil and ignorance; there are forces acting on us over which we have little control; we're not home yet, but the biggest issue is the Living Jesus we are following, the only completely innocent and pure and good and wise human being who ever lived— quite a high standard, the highest in fact— and since we are not him but following him, an integrity and performance gap will always remain, as it did with his first followers whose antics fill the four gospels, and it ought to be the cause not of despair but of humility and even some humor. We need Jesus every day, all of us, and especially pastors because people trust us and look to us.

I know a man who once modeled his life on the legendary rocker Ian Anderson of the band *Jethro Tull*. Their lyrics were his Bible, their posters the icons that covered the walls of his run down trailer, other fans his family, doing drugs while listening to their sacred music his sacrament of communion. He knew all the legends and lore of the band and their secret insider meanings. An unknown American sinner from a small town following a legendary British rock star as his true disciple, a man he never met and yet the most important figure in his life. Pitiful. And where did it end? Poorly. With his wife burned to death in a crack trailer, with him throwing away a huge inheritance, with a confused son who still struggles. How many times I prayed and pleaded, but the deception and resistance were just too deep. He believed and practiced a lie, the lie that meaning is found in the rebellions of rock and all its attractive highs, that

¹² John 10:27, "My sheep hear my voice...."

Ian Anderson was a better Savior than Jesus.

If we follow other sinners, if they are our heroes and templates, then we can be just like them, no credibility gap at all; we can be their pitiful little reflections. But if we answer the call to follow Jesus, the perfect one, then how can there not be a gap because of the difference between who is and who we are? His heart is pure, my motives always mixed. The goal is to bring the whole of life to his feet every day so the gap can be addressed, because if it gets too wide and deep, even strangers notice and scoff, “Why should I follow his God? Must not be much of a Savior! Look at him!”

There are gaps in my life and holes in my soul and surely a dose of pretense because of my public duties; there’s hypocrisy in Pastor Phil, but you already knew that, not yet the kind that erupts in scandal but enough to fill me with shame and loathing from time to time, and I suspect this is how it is with many of you. But if I keep going honestly to Jesus on my face, I find help and hope, a fresh dose of love and encouragement, and so it will be to the end when I get finally fixed. To live independently of him in unbelief and rebellion is death; it is to perish: a foretaste now, the full bitterness later.

One of the deep convictions shared by both wings of the people of God, Jews and Christians, is that the holy and loving character of God requires a final reckoning, a face to face encounter in which the truth is told in love, the question being, “Where do I stand with the God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?” All along the way God asks, “Will you trust me so I can change and ready you, or do you want to go your own way?” the end of which in verse 12 is the unpleasant little word *perish*, the same word we use when ships or planes go down, the question being, “How many souls perished?”¹³ And the answer is, “We don’t yet know,” the process is still unfolding.

So if Paul’s conclusion in v.24 is that some Jews and Christians give God a bad name, how did he arrive at that stinging indictment? Well, through a very careful train of reasoning in two paragraphs, starting with the idea that Jews and

¹³ For a brief word study on *perish*, see Charles Talbert, *Romans* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1992), 83.

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Gentiles stand on level ground when it comes to finals. Jews have the privilege of knowing the one true God and having his reflection in the Book. But that is no insulation from judgment but rather a higher accountability for their deeds. Verse 12, “For all who have sinned without the law— i.e. the Gentiles, the pagans who worship many false gods— will also perish without the law; and all who sinned under the law— i.e. the privileged Jews and Christians— will be judged by the law.” What God is after is that we not only know his ways but actually do them, as Paul states in the next verse, “For it is not the hearers of the law in the weekly synagogues service who are in a right relationship with our God, but the doers of the law who will find a welcome at the end.”¹⁴ I come to trust the God of Jesus, and in a life-giving relationship I did not earn I learn to obey God’s ways as evidence we are in relationship. And at the end God says of me the only thing that can be said, “This is one of mine. Look at the evidence. I gave mercy in Jesus to which Phil responded in trust because I made it possible, and all along we did life together, and this is where it leads.”

So a question arises, “How can God be just when he judges the Gentiles for their rebellion when they never had the written revelation?” Or, as many still ask in our day, “What about those who’ve never heard?” Well, they have heard, just not through the historical actions of the Exodus from Egypt and the records of God’s actions in Scripture and later in Jesus. Instead, God has chosen another route to include all people. God has written the most basic intuitions of right and wrong on their hearts and given them a conscience to weigh the issues of right and wrong.

All peoples engage in moral reasoning and set up structures for public order and justice, and whatever the outcomes, the bare fact of such reasoning and structures is primary testimony they are not a blank slate. The conscience works with what it finds, and what is pre-installed on the human hard disk is an intuition of right and wrong along with echoes of the Ten Commandments. The force of such inner insight cannot be ignored; it can be suppressed, but not ignored. Thus the careful reasoning of the two parallel parts of verse 14,

“For when the Gentiles who have not the law

¹⁴ My paraphrase.

by nature do what the law requires,
they are a law to themselves;
even though they do not have the law,
they show that what the law requires *is written in their hearts*,
while their *conscience* also bears witness
and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them.”

Jews, as God’s chosen people, have both the *general revelation* given to all and the *special revelation* given in their own unique history and written in Scripture. They know God in a deeply personal way. All others, the non-Jews or Gentiles, know in a much vaguer way, but still sufficient for moral accountability. The Jews have more than enough light, and all others have some light, enough to begin to seek after God and respond inwardly and outwardly. And on the final day of reckoning, the secrets of all hearts, whether or not they followed the light they had and obeyed, will be revealed, and that judgment will be generous and merciful because it is administered by Jesus Christ who came and died and rose for all, not just for some. Rebels will perish, but many more than we know will be included, those who at death cried out, “I didn’t know your name or story, but it was you who guided us, and in your great light all is now clear!” So it will be “... on that day,” says Paul, “when God judges the secrets of men’s hearts *by Jesus Christ*.”

Outsiders do not have as much light as the Jews but enough to start the journey. They have not the Book of Scripture but the Book of Creation and the Book of Conscience and the Book of Inner Witness to the One who made it all and to what is right and wrong. So no one will be able to say on that day, “I did not have enough evidence.”

The great atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell was once asked what he would say if he found himself standing before God on the judgment day and God asked him, "Why didn't you believe in Me?"

Russell replied, "I would say, 'Not enough evidence, God! Not enough evidence!'"¹⁵ I don't think so. Russell was deceived, a probably knew it.

¹⁵ www.bethinking.org/is-christianity-true/the-evidence-for-christianity

Romans 2:12-24. 14

Based on Paul theory of universal moral knowledge and the inner witness of conscience, we should not be surprised to find examples of moral nobility and insight in all extra-Jewish and pre-Christian cultures, even echoes in their myths and proverbs of Scripture’s truth. But it must all be finally measured against Jesus Christ, and will.

One of Paul’s favorite techniques is an imaginary dialog, and that is what we have in verses 17 through 24. Having secured both the judgment of the Gentiles and their source of light, Paul’s turns his attention to the privileges of God’s chosen, the Jews. And the reason the world has so long hated them—beginning with Pharaoh, and in the last century under Hitler tried to kill them all, and the reason they are in the cross hairs of Islam for extermination today—is that, despite their flaws and faults, they have preserved the revelation of the one, true, and living God, the maker of all that is, and his demands for love and worship and justice and holy living. They are the living contradiction of all other faiths but ours, because we are their long departed Messianic children, the followers of the Jesus the Jew from Nazareth whom we claim is God the Son and the bearer of God the Spirit. More than a prophet, a Son sent by the Father with the aid of the Spirit into Mary’s virgin’s womb. We are Trinitarian Jews, and because of what we have seen in Jesus that is not a contradiction but an enrichment of our understanding of God’s intra-personal complexity.¹⁶ When God shows up in person, your doctrine of God must be enriched and expanded, and to that the Jews say *not yet*, while we say *already*.

“Look at all the benefits of being a Jew,” says Paul to his friend. “Great heritage, God’s law given, a special relationship in which to have confidence, to know God’s will and to be able to reason from it. We guide the blind to new sight and draw pagans out of the shadows; we correct errant youth and introduce children to their God. In God’s law we have truth and knowledge written down for our benefit. How privileged we are!” That’s two sets of five benefits for a total of ten, and I don’t think that’s an accident, do you?

¹⁶ For a brief intro to the necessity of Trinitarian thinking as a faithful response to divine revelation, see Michael F. Bird, *What Christians Ought To Believe....* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 57-60.

Romans 2:12-24. 15

But then Paul lowers the boom on his imaginary debate partner and on the believers in Rome who are hearing the letter read. He quickly turns from privilege to responsibility and from the privilege of knowing to the duty of actually doing what God reveals. To know and to do is faith; to know and not do is an great offense against God. God’s truth is not just for our discussion but for our action. And here Paul exposes a huge credibility gap that comes with divine revelation; our privilege can make us forget our responsibility.

I call it *an integrity check*, and from time to time I get one, a whisper that asks, “Are you doing what you preach?” I know the source of the whisper; it’s a warning the gap between knowing and doing is widening and needs to be closed through repentance. Do I enact what I teach? Do I value the property of others as much as my own? If I preach tithing, am I doing it? If I’m pro-marriage, am I personally faithful in a pornified culture? If I ask others to pay taxes with thanks, could I pass an audit with gratitude? What other loyalties are vying for my heart? Any idols in the dark corners of my soul? And if I honor God from the pulpit, do I honor him in the public and private parts of life? An integrity check from on high. And if I ignore the Lord’s whisper, I soon hear from Lori, the one from whom there is no hiding and whose standards never falter! “Phil’s not listening to me, can you speak to him?” “Yes, Lord.”

And if the gap is small, we have a chance to reflect the light we talk about and for our faulty lives to yet increase the fame of Jesus because of how he has changed us. And if the gap is big, and especially if on multiple fronts at the same time— as often happens because we are all under both cultural and demonic pressure, the charge can be made against us as well, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.” Our lives have become an impediment rather than a stepping stone. We’ve gotten off the way and are now in the way.

So if you’re the only Bible some will ever read, what do they find there? I am not your judge, so let the Holy Sprit speak to you now. Welcome the light. And if you need help, call me. Like Jesus I make house calls, and no issue is out of bounds.

The Surface

Structure Of IIB. 2:12-16, 17-24

B. 2:12-24 ALL UNDER LAW: WRITTEN ON STONE, WRITTEN IN HEARTS.

1) vv.12-16 The Mosaic Law And The Witness Of Conscience In The Gentiles.

a. vv.12-13 God’s Future Judgment: Theses + Reason: *For* (2x)

Inclusion: **judged**

v.12 *For*, Thesis 1: Gentiles Judged Without Law, Jews Judged By Law

v.13 *For*, Thesis 2: Hearers Not Justified, Doers Justified

[b. vv.14a-c *For*, Present Example: Gentiles Have The Moral Law Within
“do not have the law, by nature”/ 3 lines

b’ vv.14d-15 Present Example: The Dual Witness Of The Law And

Conscience

“do not have the law... in their hearts”/ 3 lines]

a. v.16 God’s Future Judgment: Jesus Christ As Mediator.

Inclusion: **judges**

2) vv.17-24 Five Questions On Jewish Integrity, Scriptural Quotation (Is. 52:5).

Protasis 1

a. vv.17-18 Five Basic Jewish Privileges: Insider To Divine Will/Light.

Inclusions: **law, boast**

Protasis 1, Conditional sentence, “But if...”

1 + 2 pairs, Ends with *law*.

Protasis 2

b. vv.19-20 Five Supposed Benefits/Mission To Others: Gentile Outsiders

Protasis 2, Conditional sentence, “And if...”

2 pairs +1, Ends with *law*.

Apodosis

c. vv.21-24 Five Questions On The Credibility Gap Between Privilege And

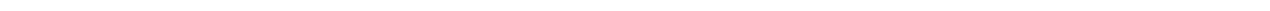
Performance

Inclusions: **boast, law**

Apodosis: Conclusion (*oun*), “Therefore...”

3 Commandments (steal, adultery, idolatry), Ends with *law*.

v.24 Indictment, *For*, Is. 52:5 (modified)



THE LOGIC OF PAUL’S PRESENTATION

1. Paul ended the previous unit with the assertion from Scripture, “For God shows no partiality” (2:11) in judgment to Jews and Greeks. But how is that possible if Jews have the advantage of the law which lays out God’s saving action and demands? Is God unfair to Gentiles? Are they judged without warning and true information?
 2. God’s impartiality in judgment is reaffirmed in v.12. Gentile sinners without the law perish without the law, and Jewish sinners who have the law perish with the law, since what God is after is heartfelt love and a growing and lifelong obedience. Jews are privileged in that they know more from within the covenant, but there is no protection against the divine demand for obedience. It’s not enough for Jews to hear the law of Moses read in the synagogue each Sabbath. Only obedience on the human side is evidence of a deep and continuing response to God’s grace. Anything less is insufficient. The consequences of *anything less* is laid out in the parallel language of *perish* and *judged* in v.12. God’s intent in giving the law is obedience, that it be carried out by the community as a witness to the world.
 3. Still, the question is open, On what basis does God judge Gentiles? Not on the law written on tablets of stone but on the rudimentary moral law of God written within on the hearts of all. Paul agreed that Gentiles sometimes get it right on a case by case basis, and that some are more noble than others. When Gentiles get it right, it is evidence God’s requirement is already *in them*. Jews have the commandments, and Gentiles are on a parallel track, a law unto themselves.
 4. Paul then engages in a reflection on theological anthropology in order to answer the question, How does the law written in the heart of all actually function? Answer: through the mediation of conscience which acts as an independent voice within the person. The heart is a hard disk containing data, and the data is the elemental intuition of what is moral. The conscience accesses the hard disk and sets up a dialog. The internal law- when brought to conscious awareness- gives the moral agent a chance to obey or not, and sometimes Gentiles make the correct- grace influenced- choice. At other times they ignore the correct voice of conscience and sin against the witness of conscience and thus against God and are thus liable to the judgments announced in v.12. God is not arbitrary. Gentiles have light.
 5. So, having dealt with Gentile accountability to the law within, Paul now shifts to Jewish accountability, not just at the end but in the present. And he does it in an elegant, persuasive means. He first lists five assets of being a Jew: the name itself, leaning on God’s law and boasting of the relationship, knowing God will and using it to discern and discriminate so as to aim at what is excellent and pleasing to God. Such a person, according to the echoes of Is. 42:6-8, has a responsibility to outsiders who are blind and in the darkness about the Lord and who are the theological equivalent of foolish children. They need the knowledge and truth only available to the Jew.
 6. Paul’s tactic is to expose the gap between privileged knowledge and missionary responsibility of the Jew and their credibility. Do they swallow what they feed others? Are they in violation of *the big ten*, specifically theft, adultery, and idolatry? They boast in God’s law, but then violate it? They are giving God a bad name.
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Study And Discussion Questions For IB1,2, Romans 2:12-24

1. Take your Bible and read Romans 2:12-24, first silently– as we normally do- and then several times out loud- which may seem odd if you are alone! It is important to hear yourself read it. Imagine yourself being the lector who read the letter out loud as a public performance to twenty or more people in one of the house churches of Rome around 58B.C. Listen for echoes and repeated patterns as you hear yourself read.

What did you hear when you read it aloud that you missed when you read silently?

2. Verses 12 and 13 should be read as a pair.

What is God after according to v.13? Read the parallels in James 1:22-25, Mt. 7:24-27.

Why is doing right always harder than knowing what's right to do?

How does the standard of v.13 explain the impartial judgments of v.12?

3. Do you believe that an elemental understanding of right and wrong is hard-wired?

How did Paul in v.14 explain the fact of Gentiles doing right without the Mosaic law?

How does conscience function in v.15? Is it possible for conscience to be disabled?

4. How do vv.14-15 explain how Gentiles are accountable to judgment in v.12a?

5. What happens on the day of judgment according to v.16?

What will it mean for God to know and tell the truth about us?

Is it good news to know that the one who died and rose for me is the agent of judgment?

6. In vv.17-24 Paul is building a case using two series of conditions (vv.17-18, vv.19-20) leading to a devastating series of questions in vv.21-24 and an indictment from Scripture in v.24.

Why such elaborate preparation?

Does religious privilege and knowledge guarantee integrity and credibility?

7. How can the concluding quote from Is. 52:5 be applied to Christians?

What does it mean that we are the only Bible some will ever read?

8. What are the function of the Ten Commandments in our day? Think of several!

