

Romans 2B

[Rom. 2:17](#) ¶ But if you bear the name “Jew” and rely upon the Law and boast in God,
[Rom. 2:18](#) and know *His* will and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law,
[Rom. 2:19](#) and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,
[Rom. 2:20](#) a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth,

- We already covered the name Jew
 - Those who relied on their birth heritage from Abraham
 - We still do this today, a Christian version of this same error
- Then Paul moves steadily through a list of supposed advantages of being a Jew
 - Rely upon the Law
 - That is they placed emphasis on having received the Mosaic Law
 - They boast in God
 - They boasted in their relationship with God through the Mosaic covenant
 - They know His will
 - Having been instructed out of the Law and by the prophets
 - Approve the things that are essential
 - Having adopted a morality in keeping with God’s expectations
- And with these advantages, the Jews secured a superior attitude
 - They were the ones leading the blind Gentile nations into the truth (v.19)
 - And they can correct the foolish and disciple the immature concerning how to please God

- Based on their having access to a form of God's knowledge of truth
 - Embodiment = a form of
- In these statements, Paul merely repeats the prevailing attitudes and beliefs common to the Jewish culture
 - Even those Jews living far from Palestine, in Rome
- So we can see the problem here, right?
 - Even though Paul gave careful argument for how all men are corrupt by nature and under condemnation, they Jews still didn't get it
 - They had a get out of hell free card – or several cards
 - But if these cards, these advantages truly worked
 - If they truly imparted a righteousness of their own
 - Then we could expect that Jews would demonstrate righteousness
 - Righteousness is as righteousness does
 - But Paul doesn't have to work very hard to illustrate the fallacy in their thinking

[Rom. 2:21](#) you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal?

[Rom. 2:22](#) You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?

[Rom. 2:23](#) You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God?

[Rom. 2:24](#) For "THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU," just as it is written.

- Paul asks them to consider the various ways in which they fall short of the very rules and standards they claim are their advantage – their hypocrisy
 - As Jews, they claim to be an authority on righteousness for others, but what about themselves?
 - Paul asks a series of questions

- Do Jews steal, do they commit adultery, do they take idols from temples for their own use?
- So the Jews who boast in the Law, break that very Law after all?
 - How is this an honor to God? How do they expect this kind of law breaking behavior to be pleasing to God?
- I find it intriguing that Paul never has to hear their answers to these questions
 - It seems he was sure he knew what the answer would be
 - An honest answer would have to be yes
 - Which illustrates the absolute universality of sin
 - Paul could ask his questions sure that the answers would be yes because all men are sinful
 - It proves his point
- To add insult to injury, Paul quotes Isaiah 52:5
 - Through a Jewish prophet, God spoke to them saying that the behavior of the Jewish nation didn't reflect righteousness
 - It shamed the name of God among the Gentile nations
 - Here's the end effect when God's children project pious self-righteousness rather than humility and grace
 - We don't make people think better of our God by portraying ourselves as righteous
 - They know better and so should we
 - When we do, we project hypocrisy which shames Christ
 - I am not righteous
 - I am a Christian – Christ follower
 - Declared righteous but not yet made righteous
 - Meanwhile, I preach a gospel of grace to men, not a declaration of my own righteousness

[Rom. 2:25](#) ¶ For indeed circumcision is of value if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.

[Rom. 2:26](#) So if the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?

[Rom. 2:27](#) And he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who though having the letter *of the Law* and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law?

[Rom. 2:28](#) For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh.

[Rom. 2:29](#) But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

- Paul now introduces the final, perhaps most personal symbol of righteousness within the Jewish culture – circumcision
 - Circumcision was the outward sign given to the Jewish of the Abrahamic Covenant
 - It had become a defacto proof of salvation among Jews
 - Much in the same way that some Christians have mistakenly come to believe that the sign of the New Covenant - baptism - is a defacto proof of salvation
 - This is why men had encouraged early believers in the church to become circumcised, as in Galatia
 - But a sign is just a sign
 - Dr. Constable compares the signs of the covenant to a label on a bottle
 - The labels indicate what's on the inside
 - But if the contents of the bottle were different than the sign, then the label is worthless
 - And even worse, it's deceptive
 - Paul says that the sign of circumcision holds value for the sake of righteousness only if the label is an accurate description of the containers contents
 - If the sign was going to signify righteousness, it would only be because the person was completely obedient to the Law

- In other words, they would need to not be a transgressor of the Law (v.25)
 - But as it was, they were transgressors – all of them
 - And therefore their label is deceptive
 - The label needs to be changed to read “uncircumcised”
- Conversely, if someone has a label of uncircumcised, but they were to live according to the Law
 - Then their label would no longer be accurate
 - They would be considered part of the club despite not having the label
 - Because it’s the ones who are actually righteousness who wear the label of righteousness
 - The inward reality of who we are is the true measure – God’s measure – of whether we are righteous
 - As Constable says:

“...reality is more important than profession and obedience more vital than testimony.”

- The final verse I read sheds a ray of light on where Paul is going in his essay
 - True circumcision has never been an act in the flesh of the human body
 - God gave men the practice of physical circumcision to memorialize a covenant and point to a redeemer
 - And the Jews came to think that circumcision automatically granted them righteousness and therefore eternal security
 - But in its physical form, it never actually achieved that purpose
 - It was merely a label, a sign of what would come later
 - But Paul says there is a kind of circumcision that does grant righteousness – always

- It always results in salvation and eternal security
- Paul is still working us through the unrighteousness of all men
 - But here he gives us a hope of a solution
 - There is a circumcision of the heart, done by the Spirit
 - As opposed to a circumcision of the flesh done by men
 - With it comes the praise of God
 - Rather than the merely the praise of men which Jew so often sought
 - What is this circumcision and how to gain it?
 - Chapter 4 will begin that testimony
- But first, Paul's evisceration of the Jewish pillars of righteousness must have begged a gigantic question for his Jewish readers
 - If these tangible things like circumcision and the Law were not able to grant righteousness in and of themselves
 - What good were they? Why bother having a Jewish nation at all?

[Rom. 3:1](#) ¶ Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision?

[Rom. 3:2](#) Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.

- Paul is walking a bit of a tightrope here
 - On the one hand he must not tolerate a Jewish view of self that was exaggerated
 - Jews were not saved merely because they were Jew
 - On the other hand, Paul can't let the Gentiles think that God had abandoned or forsaken His chosen people
 - The first error leads to Jewish hypocrisy
 - The second error leads to replacement theology

- So in chapters 3 -4 and again in chapters 9-11 Paul will deal with the question of the Jewish nation's place and purpose in God's plan of redemption
 - For now, Paul simply addresses a question of advantage
 - With four rhetorical questions, Paul answers how being a Jew is an advantage if all men are equally condemned before God
- What advantage has the Jew? What benefit was circumcision?
 - Paul says these promises were of great effect
 - First, Jews were entrusted with the Word of God
 - The word for first is protos, which means of first importance
 - Or above all else
 - The revelation of God through prophets was provided to Jewish men
 - They had an inherent advantage
 - They had God's revelation
 - And they were entrusted with it, so that it would be preserved and shared with mankind
 - This was an immense privilege that the Jewish nation was granted, which led to many Jews knowing God's mercy
 - And by faith in God's word, many received salvation
 - But what about those who didn't believe and weren't faithful to God? – Question #2

[Rom. 3:3](#) What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it?

[Rom. 3:4](#) May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man *be found* a liar, as it is written,

" THAT YOU MAY BE JUSTIFIED IN YOUR WORDS,
AND PREVAIL WHEN YOU ARE JUDGED."

- Does the fact that some turned against Him mean that God was unfaithful?
 - Unfaithful in the sense that all Jews were supposed to be saved, but God failed some
 - Paul says of course not
 - Every man is a liar, but God remains true
 - Paul is essentially saying the same thing here that he says in 2Tim later

[2Tim. 2:13](#) If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.

- God had made promises to the nation of Israel that He would keep
 - And He would keep His promises even when individuals within the nation were unfaithful to Him
- In fact, to prove the point, Paul quotes from a great case study of unfaithfulness
 - He quotes the testimony of a man, famous in all Israel
 - A man to whom God made great promises of a future kingdom and an eternal throne
 - Yet this man was unfaithful at times to God

[Psa. 51:2](#) Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity
And cleanse me from my sin.

[Psa. 51:3](#) For I know my transgressions,
And my sin is ever before me.

[Psa. 51:4](#) Against You, You only, I have sinned
And done what is evil in Your sight,
So that You are justified when You speak
And blameless when You judge.

- Paul quotes David's words to emphasize that even this great Jew had to acknowledge his unfaithfulness before God
 - And yet God has made important and eternal promises to David and the nation that He is fulfilling despite David's unfaithfulness
- So, we can't claim that God is unfaithful simply because an individual Jew is unbelieving or unfaithful

- This leads to question #3

[Rom. 3:5](#) But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in human terms.)

[Rom. 3:6](#) May it never be! For otherwise, how will God judge the world?

- OK Paul, you're telling us that there was advantage in being a Jew
 - Since it meant we had the Word of God
 - And in that word were promises to the nation of Israel
 - And even though the Jews were unrighteous, His righteousness shines through as He keeps His promises
 - Like David...we can see God's mercy and grace and faithfulness all the more because of David's failings
 - So shouldn't we expect God to overlook the sins of all Jews so that God's righteousness might be magnified all the more?
 - In fact, wouldn't it be unrighteous for God to inflict wrath against these sinful Jews?
 - After all, wouldn't that be a violation of His promises to them?
- Of course, Paul gives the natural answer
 - First, he makes sure that no one thinks he agrees with this line of reasoning by making a parenthetical comment
 - This is a human argument, not something a godly person would suggest
 - Then Paul deals with it – may it never be
 - If God were to overlook the sins of the Jewish people without cause, how could He judge the world?
 - If He were to ignore the sin of Jewish men, God would be showing partiality
 - He could no longer be qualified to act as a fair and righteous judge of men
 - So God will judge the sinning Jew without partiality

- Now question 4

[Rom. 3:7](#) But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner?

[Rom. 3:8](#) And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some claim that we say), "Let us do evil that good may come"? Their condemnation is just.

- Paul raises a simple corollary to question #3
 - On a personal level, isn't the sinning of a Jew actually helping God by giving Him more opportunity to show His glory in mercy
 - Shouldn't He congratulate the sinning Jew rather than condemn him?
 - Paul answers their question with a sarcastic question of his own
 - IF you're going to say that, then why not live according to the motto that some have accused Paul of teaching elsewhere
 - Let us do evil that good may come.
 - In other words, if you really believe this kind of absurd logic, then why are you endeavoring to do anything good
 - Shouldn't you do all evil all the time?
 - But since you don't choose to live that way, then clearly you don't truly hold to that view
 - And Paul leaves the argument sitting there unaddressed so as not to dignify it
 - He simply refers to the just condemnation of those who propose it
- So now the Jewish reader comes to the same point as before
 - Though there are promises made to the Jewish nation
 - Promises to which God will remain faithful
 - Individual Jews must stand the same judgment that all men face

[Rom. 3:9](#) ¶ What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin;

[Rom. 3:10](#) as it is written,

“ THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;

[Rom. 3:11](#) THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS,

THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;

[Rom. 3:12](#) ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS;

THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD,

THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.”

[Rom. 3:13](#) “ THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE,
WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING,”

“ THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS”;

[Rom. 3:14](#) “ WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS”;

[Rom. 3:15](#) “ THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD,

[Rom. 3:16](#) DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS,

[Rom. 3:17](#) AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN.”

[Rom. 3:18](#) “ THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES.”

- So what are you saying Paul?
 - Are the Jews better off than Gentiles or not?
 - No
 - Here Paul reminds them of what he said in chapter 1 and chapter 2
 - All men – Jews and Greeks – are under a charge of sin
 - As it is written in their own scriptures
 - Paul cites two Psalms (14 & 53)
- All men are unrighteous
 - Not even one man can stand on his own before God and expect to be called righteous
 - But it gets worse
 - Verse 11 – no man even understands his own predicament
 - Left to his own senses and intellect and nature and will, every human being will stray away from God

- And absolutely none of them – no man – will of his own nature and volition ever seek after God so as to find Him
- The very nature of men is such that not only so they sin habitually, but they are enslaved to sin
 - And this enslavement is such that it proves to be an impenetrable barrier through which no man may reach God
 - Moreover, no man even tries
 - His sin nature is so corrosive that it only serves to drive him farther and farther away from God
 - Like a rock dropped in the sea
 - It moves only downward, away from the light of the surface
 - And unless someone reaches down into the dark, the rock will continue to fall and can never rescue itself
- All have turned aside
 - Together they have become useless
 - But the original word in Hebrew was corrupt
 - None do good
 - And there is no fear of God before their eyes
- With that Paul is ready to move to a new discussion
 - The Jews raised the question of whether having the Law gave them an advantage
 - So Paul will not entertain that point, but from a different perspective
 - How the Law was intended to condemn all men
 - And that introduces the discussion of how condemnation under the Law leads to a common solution for all men - grace