

# So...What About the Law

## Romans 2:12-29

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**Introduction:** Humans are very inclined to condemn one another's behavior while excusing the same thing in themselves. Religion tends to amplify this human trait. Humans imagine that God will see their condemnation of others as evidence that they themselves are righteous. Even Bible believing Christians practice this. But...as we saw last week, God is on to this practice.

**Romans 2:3** <sup>3</sup> But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same *yourself*, that you will escape the judgment of God?

No religious membership or ritual practice will ever justify men before Him because God intends to judge all men on their actual deeds and every transgression will receive its just penalty. Most men do not believe this. There is a prevailing opinion in the world that God just forgives everything and that nothing needs to be made right. As one person put it to me once..."God is obligated to forgive me!" This reveals a stubborn unrepentance.

**Romans 2:5** <sup>5</sup> But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, AND....

**Romans 2:11** <sup>11</sup> ....there is no partiality with God.

If religion will not save you then what about personal morality. This is the belief that we are good or at least good enough. There is in western culture and society a religious standard for this moral goodness. It so universally recognized as God's righteous standard, that it is banned in American public life precisely for that reason. It is not that Americans particularly want to murder, steal, commit perjury or adultery. What is intolerable is that God has set down an absolute standard. Men call this standard the Ten Commandments. They are a summary of the righteous requirements of God's Holy Law.

Religion cannot justify because God ignores all your religion when He judges you. You will be judged exclusively for your works and nothing else. How perfectly did you conform to God's standard of righteousness? It is not surprising that mankind and Satan would want to ban that righteous standard and substitute one of their own liking. There are nevertheless millions who are going to seek to gain entrance into heaven by keeping The Law. Our text this morning answers the question..."What About the Law? In it God reveals that with or without THE LAW....

- All men perish for the same reason... they have sinned [12-13]
- All men have a moral conscience before God [14-15]
- All men will be judged inwardly and equally [16-24]
- All men's religious righteousness will not save [25-27]
- All men require inner righteousness to be saved [28-29]

## **All men perish for the same reason... they have sinned [12-13]**

### **For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law [12a]:**

This is a continuation of Paul's argument from chapter one. Men know that there is a God. They know it from Creation:

**Psalm 19:1** The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

Furthermore...God proactively reveals His existence to men through His creation:

**Romans 1:19-20** <sup>19</sup> because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. <sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

It is not true that men go to hell because they have never prayed to receive Jesus Christ as their Savior. Men go into a Christless eternity because they defy, resist and even suppress God, knowing full well that He exists. It is for this reason that they are without excuse. All men are judged by the light they **have** and not the light they do not have.

**All who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law [12b]:** BUT...if you sin while being exposed to the Law of God the result will be exactly the same. The Jews like most Americans have been born "under The Law." We have more than a natural conscience telling us right from wrong. We have the written Law of the Living God and we sin anyway. Scripture says we are therefore judged by the Law. We have already made the point that the word translated "judge" also means "condemn." In this context that is clearly its meaning.

***It is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified [13]:*** Those who hear the law somehow conclude that they have some special favor from hearing it. If you are going to put up the Ten Commandments in your home you need to know this. They only have saving value if you keep them all perfectly. What they actually are is the divine indictment of humanity's inability to save itself!

**James 2:10-11** <sup>10</sup> For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all. <sup>11</sup> For He who said, "DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY," also said, "DO NOT COMMIT MURDER." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

## **All men have a moral conscience before God [14-16]**

**For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law [14a]:** Men are not always evil. They are dead to God, but they still do a lot of good things. Mothers love their children and wives their husbands. They know instinctively that they should do this. Unbelievers are still image bearers of the Living God.

**These, not having the Law, are a law to themselves [14b]:** They also know what they should not be doing. Children know, for example, that they should not disobey their parents. This is why they try to hide it from them. Men know they should not lie, that is why they will go to great lengths to conceal their lies, their adulteries and their murders. Do you see what God is trying to say here? You do not need The Ten Commandments to tell you right and wrong. Men know many of them already....instinctively....by nature. The proof is all around you and it is in you.

**In that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts [15a]:** This is not the same as the Law being written in their hearts. That is something more specific and it is done in the lives of God's redeemed, chosen children. Those made a part of the New Covenant by the blood of Jesus Christ.

**Jeremiah 31:33** But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Instead this is the general revelation of God to all men about what is right and what is wrong. They have never seen it in the Word of God. This is the conscience.

**Their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them [15]:** It is the voice inside that says you are doing wrong or doing right. Scripture says that those who do not have the Law of God do have this.

So then....can we let our conscience be our guide? Risky! To say the least! BECAUSE...

- It can be overly sensitive and lead you into error:

**1 Corinthians 10:25-26** <sup>25</sup> Eat anything that is sold in the meat market without asking questions for conscience' sake; <sup>26</sup> FOR THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S, AND ALL IT CONTAINS.

- It can become seared and no longer protect you from evil:

**1 Timothy 4:2-4** <sup>2</sup> by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, <sup>3</sup> men who forbid marriage *and advocate* abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. <sup>4</sup> For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude;

The point is this....Men without the Law have been given a conscience to reveal to them that they are sinners. They DO NOT follow it! They sin and they know they are sinning.

**On the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus [16]:** As flawed as it is, it will still be functional when men are judged in the final day. They will not be wondering why they are facing condemnation for things that they never knew were wrong. They do know they are wrong. They can pretend now that they do not and they can keep it a secret, but there will be no secrets in the final judgment.

## **All men will be judged inwardly and equally [17-24]**

**But if you bear the name "Jew " and rely upon the Law [17a]:** Now we will need to put ourselves in the Jew's place for a moment. They were special. God had chosen a single man from the family of humanity and decided to make this unique nation from that one man. God subsequently gave them the Ten Commandments and the Law. It was this they came to rely on and NOT GOD! The fact that they possessed it was seen as an approval from God. Christians do this same thing today with the Bible. They rely on it and not on the Savior it reveals.

**And boast in God [17b]:** Not in their relationship to God, but in their possession of God. They, of all the peoples of the world, possessed God...and the bragged about it!

**And know *His* will and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law [18]:** Because of the Law they DID ACTUALLY know God's will. They were very approving of the things that they learned from the Law.....But as Scripture points out repeatedly it is not the hearing of the Law that matters but the doing of it.

**And are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, [19]:** Because they have heard the Law and given mental assent to it they feel qualified to guide others. In some ways this is what the Law was supposed to do. It was supposed to instruct men so that they would know the will of God and approve it as the greatest good.

**A corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth [20]:** This would be the logical outcome of having God's objective truth in written form. BUT....knowing the truth and obeying it are two different things. A head full of Bible knowledge can be a very dangerous thing because it makes you MORE accountable, not less. More ripe for judgment and not less. Teaching the Scripture is not the ultimate goal. NOT EVEN KNOWING THE SCRIPTURE! It is knowing God through the Scripture. More specifically it is knowing Christ who is the revealer of God to you. That is why God gave the Law and the prophets. This is why you should come to church, hear sermons and read the Scripture....Jesus said to the Jews;

**John 5:39-40** <sup>39</sup> You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, <sup>40</sup> yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

**You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? [21a]:** Paul has listed the things about the Law that are praiseworthy. But the problem is the Jew. And it is not their Jewishness....it is their humanity. They are fallen, broken sinners who cannot attain to the righteous standard that God requires. Because of their human condition, they cannot do the things they so confidently teach others to do. He lists some of them...

**You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal? [21b]:** God is not saying that every Jew is a thief. The fact that some are is intended to show that the LAW cannot make men righteous. And everyone knows or has known a religious person who steals. The Jews were no exception to this.

**You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? [22a]:** This is one of humankind's most besetting sins. Everyone knows someone who has committed this sin or has committed it themselves. The point is...again...Having a Law against it does not and cannot keep a man from doing it. This is very much like the young people I saw smoking under the "Tobacco Free Zone" sign. Such things cannot change the inner man and that is where our behavior originates.

**You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? [22b]:** It was common for Jews not to pay the Temple Tax. They hated this tax and would go to great lengths to avoid it. God Himself leveled this charge at the entire nation.

**Malachi 3:8-9** <sup>8</sup> Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In your tithes and contributions. <sup>9</sup> You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you.

**You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God? [23]:** This is a summary statement designed to make the point that even though they have the Law...THE LAW is not able to make them righteous.

**For "THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU," just as it is written. [24]:** Probably refers to

**Isaiah 52:5** "And now what do I have here?" declares the LORD. "For my people have been taken away for nothing, and those who rule them mock," declares the LORD. "And all day long my name is constantly blasphemed.

It was the sin of The Jews that caused their captivity. They just totally ignored and disobeyed the Law of God and because of that the nations around them blasphemed God....They belittled God and mocked Him. This was a well documented fact of Jewish history and the Jews reading this knew it was true and that God Himself had said it. The Law is God's perfect standard of righteousness

**Romans 7:12** <sup>12</sup> So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

BUT...it cannot make men righteous. It was NEVER given for that reason. It was given to reveal your accountability to God.

**Romans 3:19-20** <sup>19</sup> Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; <sup>20</sup> because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin.

### **All men's religious righteousness will not save [25-27]**

**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 [25]:** Outward indicators of righteousness are of value when they reveal the heart. Most men

use them to mask the heart. Other men may be fooled or impressed, but our family and spouses and closest associates are usually not. God certainly isn't and yet people...in this case the religious Jew, persist in believing that God is impressed with something done to them when they were eight days old. Countless Christians feel the same way about their infant baptism.

A woman came up to me once when I was about to begin the funeral for her father and said, "please do not say anything nice about my father! If you do no one here will believe another single thing you have to say." WOW! Can you imagine this being your legacy with your children or friends? Moralism, religion and Law keeping are absolutely worthless when it is used to mask the sin in our hearts. So many Christians are living in this fantasy world of legalism. Please...I beg you not to do this. There is something entirely and blessedly superior. It is the Gospel, and it sets us free from such foolishness as Paul described to the Colossians.....

**Colossians 2:20-23** <sup>20</sup> If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, <sup>21</sup> "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" <sup>22</sup> (which all *refer to* things destined to perish with use)-- in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? <sup>23</sup> These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, *but are* of no value against fleshly indulgence.

**So if the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? [26]:** This is a really big "if" as we will see in chapter three. But...Paul hypothesizes.... "if a man did keep all the righteous requirements of the law would circumcision be required too?" "If a man were perfectly righteous in his heart before the God of Creation would he also need some outward mark in the flesh to be acceptable to God?" The implied rhetorical answer is "absolutely not!"

**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? [27]:** And following the same argument....would not such a righteous man be fit to condemn someone with all the outward marks of Law keeping and religion, but who still has a wicked unconverted heart of sin? Again...."Absolutely Yes!"

And this was not some fabrication of Paul's. Paul was a teacher of The Law and he knew that God had been making this point for centuries...going clear back to the beginning.

**Deuteronomy 10:14-22** <sup>14</sup> Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. <sup>15</sup> Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day. <sup>16</sup> Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. <sup>19</sup> Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. <sup>20</sup> You shall fear the LORD your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and by his name you shall swear. <sup>21</sup> He is your praise. He is your God, who has done for you these great and

terrifying things that your eyes have seen. <sup>22</sup> Your fathers went down to Egypt seventy persons, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven.

### **All men need inner righteousness to be saved [28-29]**

**For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. [28]:** Paul is not creating new doctrine. This is Old Testament Orthodox Doctrine. The Jews of Paul's day had consigned their Scripture to the dust bin of history. Jesus taught out of and quoted the OT. Paul and all the apostles did the same.

**But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart [29a]:** God is speaking and He is calling the Jew and all men to forsake their trust in outward religions, confessions and practices. Even the very ones that God ordained are NOT to be trusted in for salvation. They can never take away your sins. For the Christian this would include your baptism and communion. It would take in your church membership and personal morality and your good doctrine.

Every single one of the things I just mentioned are good and we are instructed by God to do them faithfully....BUT....like the law they can never ever save you.

**By the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God. [29b]:** The saved Jew, like the saved practitioner of Christianity must be saved in the inner man. This is a work of God that cannot be accomplished by external factors. No matter how much praise we get from men the only thing that matters is if we receive praise from God. I think we all know that is not going to happen. And this is the entire point of Romans 2. The writer to the Hebrews continued to drive this point home to our hearts.

**Hebrews 10:1-4** For the Law, since it has *only* a shadow of the good things to come *and* not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. <sup>2</sup> Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? <sup>3</sup> But in those *sacrifices* there is a reminder of sins year by year. <sup>4</sup> For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

**CONCLUSION:** Religion cannot save you because God disregards it and judges your actual deeds. Every sin must be accounted for. Every wrong made right. We desire this to happen to other people. We say..."there ought to be a law!" of "how can they get away with that?" BUT not so fast....When we condemn others, we demonstrate that our sins are also worthy of condemnation. When we call for judgment for other's sins we are calling for our own as well.

Okay....so religion is of no value to God! What about my personal behavior? Surely that is what God is talking about now. The keeping of His commandments will certainly be acceptable to Him when I die and face God in the judgment. GOD SAYS NO! Not because there is something wrong with the Ten Commandments, but because there is something wrong with you. It is not enough to believe the Ten Commandments God says to men. You must keep them without exception. And we have never done that, nor has any other human being who knows them.

The preaching of the Gospel is intended to render us hopelessly lost. God counters every excuse and nullifies all the righteousness men hope in. And this is by design....so that you will hope only in Christ. SO that you will be so hopelessly lost....so convinced that there is no way to ever please God....that you will come and give your heart....your life and body to Jesus Christ.

**Why will that work when nothing else will?** Because Jesus is God's own Son who left heaven to become a human man. He lived the only sinless human life which pleased God in every way. It was perfect...without weakness or failure. If you had lived that life you would be assured of heaven, but you have not and cannot.

But Christ will give you His Perfect life when you entrust yourself to Him. Saving faith shuns everything else. It pushes aside hope in morality, religion and even keeping of the Ten Commandments. It throws itself into the arms of Christ and rests there for eternity. This was Christ's invitation when on earth and it still stands today. As long as you trust yourself and your efforts in any way you will hunger and thirst for righteousness.

**John 6:32-40** <sup>2</sup> Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. <sup>33</sup> "For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world." <sup>34</sup> Then they said to Him, "Lord, always give us this bread." <sup>35</sup> Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst. <sup>36</sup> "But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe. <sup>37</sup> "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. <sup>38</sup> "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. <sup>39</sup> "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. <sup>40</sup> "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."

BEHOLD THE SON! TRUST ONLY IN HIM!  
HE WILL GIVE YOU ETERNAL LIFE!