



Lesson 6

The True Jew

Romans 2.17-3.8

“But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart...”
Romans 2.29

Misplaced Boasting By The Jews (2.17-24)

Romans 2:17–24 (NASB95)

17But if you bear the name “Jew” and rely upon the Law and boast in God,

18and know His will and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law,

19and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,

20a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth,

21you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal?

22You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?

23You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God?

24For “THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU,” just as it is written.

1. The focus of Paul’s words in vss. 1-16 were on the impartiality of God, that both God’s blessings and wrath would come equally on Jew and Gentile based on their works, not their nationality. But what about Israel’s status as God’s special people (Exodus 19:4-6, etc.)? Did that mean nothing? Paul addresses that notion in this section.
2. The name “Jew” is taken from the name “Judah” who was the 4th son of Jacob, the one through whom the promised Messiah would ultimately come (see Genesis 49:10). It was the tribe of David and its name was taken for the southern kingdom when Israel divided after the death of Solomon (see 1Kings 12). Once Israel was taken captive by the Assyrians (see 2Kings 17) only the kingdom of Judah remained and the term “Jew” became synonymous for all Israelites.
3. The name has a literal meaning of “the praised one.” It may be that Paul used the name purposefully here as the Jews thought that they brought praise to Jehovah as a nation, and were thus praised by Him. However, their boasting was unfounded.
4. The Jews boasted in the fact that they had God’s Law (vss. 17-18). This made them boast that God was their God, that they knew His will, and thus they knew the correct course

of action in all things (the sense of “approve the things that are essential”). This boasting in Law was reflected in the apocryphal work 2 Baruch: *“In you we have put our trust, because, behold, your Law is with us, and we know that we do not fall as long as we keep your statutes. We shall always be blessed; at least, we did not mingle with the nations. For we are all a people of the Name; we, who received one Law from the One. And that Law which is among us will help us, and that excellent wisdom which is in us will support us.”*

5. Furthermore, since they were the people of the Law, they felt themselves qualified to lead the nations (vss. 19–20). This likely echoes the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 42:6–7. The Jews viewed themselves as privileged and able to guide and give light to the nations. And in their minds this would require the nations to keep the Law since they viewed it as “the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth.”
6. But there was a problem: the Jews committed the very sins they warned against! (vss. 21–22) It’s interesting that the three sins Paul mentions (stealing, adultery and idolatry) have nothing to do with Jewish cultic practice (i.e. circumcision, sacrifices, feasts, etc.) but are from the 10 Commandments and stress basic morality (see Exodus 20.15,14,4–5).
7. The result: God wasn’t being given honor or praise (a play on the name “Jew”), but was being dishonored! (vss. 23–24). The quotation is from Isaiah 52:5 where the destruction of God’s people brought dishonor on God. In Paul’s day their misconduct and hypocrisy were bringing dishonor on Him! Their boasting was misplaced!

True Circumcision, The True Jew (2.25-29)

Romans 2:25–29 (NASB95)

25For indeed circumcision is of value if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.

26So if the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?

27And 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?

28For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh.

29But 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.

1. It would be hard to overemphasize just how important circumcision was to the Jews. As we read in Genesis 17.9–14, it was the perpetual sign of God’s covenant with Abraham. The mark of circumcision was so important to the Jews that to speak of the Gentiles was to speak of the uncircumcised. As we’ve already seen, the matter of circumcision/uncircumcision was a point of great tension when the gospel first went to the Gentiles (see Acts 11.3; 15.1)
2. However, if circumcision was just a mark in the flesh, it meant nothing! God had always stated that He sought for circumcised hearts (see Deut 10.16; Jer 4.4), so why would they

rely on a physical marking?

3. No, physical circumcision (belonging to the covenant people of God) was only of value if they submitted to and followed God's will. Having already established that God is impartial (vss. 1-16), Paul applies the principle to the circumcised and uncircumcised. It is keeping God's will that counts!
4. Vss. 28-29 put the matter bluntly: the true Jews (those who bring praise to God and are praised by Him) are not those who have the mark in their flesh, but in their heart. This one does not receive his praises from men, but from God!
5. This section helps us to see the problem Paul was addressing. It was Jewish dependence on the outward. The fact that they had God's Law, the fact that they had the sign of circumcision. But if those things were not accompanied by hearts and minds given to God and following His will, they were useless!

Three Objections Answered (3.1-8)

Romans 3:1-8 (NASB95)

1Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision?

2Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.

3What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it?

4May 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."

5But 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.)

6May it never be! For otherwise, how will God judge the world?

7But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner?

8And 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.

1. **First objection: is there no advantage to being a Jew? (vss. 1-2)** Paul's answer is that there is definitely an advantage, because it was to the Jews that God's revealed will came! It should be noted that Paul does not say that they were entrusted with God's Law, but with His oracles. As we've noted, the oracles of God pointed to the salvation of the Jews AND Gentiles (see Isaiah 49.1-8). Furthermore, there is a play on "faith" in this passage. God "entrusted" (pisteuo) this message to the Jews, but they did not believe (apisteo)! (vs. 3)
2. **Second objection: has our unfaithfulness nullified God's faithfulness? (vss. 3-4)** Thankfully God is not like man! His faithfulness has never depended on man's faithfulness. Yes, receiving the promised rewards demands that man be faithful, but God will always be faithful to His word. Vs. 4 emphasizes this point drawing on a passage where David confessed

his sins to God (Psalm 51.4). The point is that God will always be faithful to His covenant (with both Jew and Gentile). The whole world may be found to be unfaithful, but not God!

3. Third objection: if our sins confirm God's righteousness, how can He condemn us? (vss. 5-8). Paul recognizes that this is not a sound argument, and it certainly doesn't deserve a God-given response (I am speaking in human terms), but just to make it clear he affirms that the faithful God is just, and He will judge the world. Man's unfaithfulness may highlight the contrast with his faithful God, but that faithful God will judge. And as we will shortly see, that's a problem for all of us!