

The Book of Romans

By Doug Hamilton

Romans 2:1-29 “What Are You Trusting In?”

Paul wrote in *2 Corinthians 2:1* *And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God.* The philosophers of the first century were famous for their many ways to articulate their arguments. Paul did not like to play along with it. He warned us to “*see to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception...*” (*Col 2:8*), but to be determined to focus on Christ and Him crucified (*1 Corinthians 2:2*). Therefore he was very care in his encounters with the philosophers to not be distracted.

Sometimes he would even use their own methods to argue back. The case in point would be in *Romans 2*. There was a particular technique used by the Stoic philosophers called the *diatribe*. This was a style of argument where the philosopher would publically reason both sides of the position. It was an effective means to cause others to listen and be won over. In *Romans 2* Paul makes his argument using a *diatribe* method as well.

The Diatribe Argument of Paul

Romans 2:1-4 Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. ² And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. ³ 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? ⁴ Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?

Jesus said in *Matthew 7:1* “*Do not judge so that you will not be judged.*” This is one of the secularist’s favorite verses, for they teach that if you never judge the actions of another, then you shall escape being personally judged yourself. The problem is that they leave out the very next verse. *Matthew 7:2* “*For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and ^aby your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.*” He was not saying that we should never to judge societal actions, but to make sure to remember that we will be judged by the same standard.

This appears to be the argument which Paul is advancing. In the last chapter Paul the argument against the declining morality of the Gentile world. It is a God-suppressed world which the Lord gave them over to impurity, degrading passions and a depraved mind. It is a world which the Jews considered themselves to be immune from, for they were the chosen people of God. They reasoned that they were naturally immune to the wrath of God because of their Jewish lineage. Many of their sayings reflected this.

- “God loves Israel alone of all the nations of the earth.”
- “God will judge the Gentiles with one measure and the Jews with another. All Israelites will have part in the world to come.”
- “Gentiles are the fuel of hell.”

When the Jewish Christians were allowed to return after the exile imposed by Claudius, this attitude arrived with them. They could not stand the thought of not being the leading

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spiritual force in the Roman gentile dominated church. This is the basis of Paul's diatribe argument.

The "you" Paul was referring to was a Jew making the argument with an attitude of privilege and immunity because of their lineage. They forget that the Law of Moses was never meant to justify a single Jew, but to convict of sin. Paul reminds the Galatians in 3:11 "*that no one is justified by the Law before God*". No police officer has ever pulled over someone who obeyed the law and given them a check for a reward, but a punishment called a traffic violation for a violation. The Law to the Jew did not save a Jew, but only catch and convict them of the same sin that the Gentiles were guilty of. The "you" (i.e. Jew) claiming superiority through being the covenant receiver of the Law has missed the point of God's *kindness, tolerance and patience* (2:4), the causative factors of repentance. Paul's counterargument of the diatribe is the *impartiality of God*.

Romans 2:5-11 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, ⁶ who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: ⁷ to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; ⁸ but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. ⁹ *There will be* tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, ¹⁰ but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹¹ For there is no partiality with God.

These Jews had forgotten that God will reward people "*according to their deeds*", not according to their lineage. Paul is quoting a King David from Psalms 62:12, a man under the Law. This was a preview of the advanced argument to come in Romans 4.

This should be a reminder to those who are of the "faith only" persuasion of the Calvinist world. A person is not saved by the works of the Law any more than a Gentile is saved by the works of the same standard. They are both saved by "*grace through faith*" (Eph. 2:8-9) of God found in the in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (1 Cor. 15:1-4). It is through salvation that a man is re-confirmed of his understanding of the covenant by walking in the light as God is in the light (1 John 1:7). We will be judged if we adopt the practice of living a double life of deadly deeds, for it will be our undoing. There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil. *James 1:22 But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves*. This applies to both the Jew and the Greek, for there is no partiality with God.

Romans 2:12-16 For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law; ¹³ for *it is* not the hearers of the Law *who* are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified. ¹⁴ For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, ¹⁵ in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately

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accusing or else defending them,¹⁶ on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.

Six centuries prior to Jesus walking the earth, Jeremiah foretold of a New Covenant to come. In Jeremiah 31:31-34 he says “*Behold, days are coming,*” declares the LORD, “*when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,*³² *not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,*” declares the LORD.³³ “*But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,*” declares the LORD, “*I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*³⁴ “*They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,*” declares the LORD, “*for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.*”

Under the Law, a Jew entered covenant when he or she was born. They would be raised in a Jewish home and at age 13 were formally taught about the covenant they were born into. In the New Covenant, the Christian dispensation, a person would learn first and then be “*born again*” (John 3:3) with that information. They make a decision to be “*born of water and the Spirit*” when they are baptized into Christ, acceptance of the covenant.

Romans 2:17-24 But if you bear the name “Jew” and rely upon the Law and boast in God,¹⁸ and know *His* will and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law,¹⁹ and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,²⁰ a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth,²¹ you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal?²² You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?²³ You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God?²⁴ For “THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU,” just as it is written.

John the Baptist said to the Jews while clinging to their prideful pedigree “*and do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father,’ for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham*” (Luke 3:8). He was attempting to transfer their allegiance to repentance instead. They needed to bear fruit, not genealogy.

Paul is on the same page. For those who still want to cling to their lineage by saying “I am a Jew” and “I have the Law of Moses”, he reminds them of the Jewish historical practices. They had a terrible history of disobeying the Law as confirmed in their Old Testament writings. Thinking they were the guides to the world on how to live a moral life unto God, they committed every abomination against Him. Instead of being a light unto the gentiles (Isaiah 42:6), they blasphemed His name, as quoted in Isaiah 52:5 and Ezekiel 36:20.

Romans 2:25-29 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.²⁶ So if the

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uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? 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? ²⁸ For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. 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 again brings up another argument of the Jew, “But we are the people of circumcision!” According to Genesis 17:10-14, Abraham was told that all male children that reached eight days old was to be circumcised as a reminder of the covenant. Because the land they were to possess was filled with sexual immorality, God wanted them to always have an intimate reminder of the standards they were to hold in that area of their lives. A Jew could not commit immorality and not have the reminder of the covenant right in front of them, convicting them of the very thing they promised not to do. Circumcision was the primary reminder to the Jew that they were the covenant people of God among a pagan world. As the famous There is a famous Rabbinic saying goes, “no person who is circumcised will go down to Gehenna” (*Exod. Rab. 19 [81c]*).

In the spirit of the diatribe, Paul would once again destroy that argument. He reasoned that if they violated what their circumcision stood for, then they in essence are “uncircumcised”. Likewise if someone who is uncircumcised lives a moral life unto God, then he is really “circumcised”. Circumcision meant nothing in the scheme of things, for what mattered is whether the person was committed to God in how they lived for God. A true Jew is not one who has a circumcised foreskin, but the circumcision of the heart by the Spirit. This is what God has always wanted since the beginning of the Jewish faith. *Dt. 30:6* “*Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live.*”

In Colossians 2:11-15 we are told that we are made complete in every way through Jesus, having been “*circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ*” (11). When did this incredible event in our lives occur? When we were “*buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead*” (12). We were “dead in our transgressions and the uncircumcision of our flesh, but were made alive together with Jesus (13). We hinged everything on faith in His death, burial and resurrection, having all our sins taken out of the way and nailed to His cross (14).

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Conclusion:

What do we learn from this text which we can apply today?

- 1) Stop trusting that you are fine with God because you grew up in the Churches of Christ. Just because you grew up in the church, have attended worship services for years and have never left does not mean you are right with God. Do not cling to your lineage.
- 2) Stop trusting that you are fine with God because you have made changes in your life. Just because you have stopped the drinking, stopped the drugs, stopped the anger, stopped the immorality does not mean you are right with God. There are many reasons why someone changes a behavior and many means in which to change it. Do not cling to your righteousness.
- 3) Stop trusting that you are fine with God because you were dipped in water. I might anger some people here, but truth is truth. Just because you were immersed in water in the name of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit does not mean you are right with God. If you are not taking the right faith into the water or you are taking no faith into the water, then you were only dipped in water. There is no circumcision of the flesh by Jesus if you only got wet.

Yes we need to be baptized. Yes we need to be in fellowship. Yes we need to live a life of repentance. All are done in faith and in respect to Jesus and His work on the cross. We are baptized because we believe in His death, burial and resurrection. We fellowship together because we share the commonality of the death, burial and resurrection. We live a new life because we have the new outlook of the death, burial and resurrection. That is what Paul is referring to. Celebrate this event and never let it go!