

Paul makes an extremely interesting statement in Romans 2:12, teaching that “*all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law.*” The word “*sinned*” in this instance points to a lifestyle of habitual sin without choosing to receive Christ as Savior. Is it fair for God to respond to the unsaved in this manner? Can individuals who have never been exposed to the Law given to Moses, know about God? They certainly can, for Romans 1:20 teaches that God’s creation reveals “*...His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature...*” Many people were declared righteous by God (after exercising repentance and faith while depraved) before Moses received the Law. Therefore, Paul’s statement in verse 12 is contextually sound.

In addition, we know that “*all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law*” (Romans 2:12); “*sinned*” again points to a lifestyle of habitual sin without submitting to Christ as Savior. Thus, everyone who has been exposed to the Law, and refused to accept Christ while depraved, “*will be judged by the Law*” at the “*great white throne*” judgment of Revelation 20:11-15.

Those who have heard the Law, but refused to believe in the “*seed*” of Genesis 3:15, Who “*is Christ*” (Galatians 3:16), have not received a “*just*” standing “*before God*” (Romans 2:13).

Paul’s last statement in verse 13, when studied in context, brings much truth into focus:

*...but the doers of the Law will be justified.* (Romans 2:13)

How can individuals be “*doers of the Law*” (v.13) when through breaking the Law on one count they are guilty of breaking it on all counts (James 2:10)? We can be “*doers of the Law*” only under the condition that we repent and exercise faith in Christ, Who lived the Law perfectly (Galatians 4:4; Hebrews 4:15) and takes up residence in us after we repent and believe while depraved (Galatians 2:20). Only through Jesus living in us (Galatians 2:20), and us living in Jesus (2Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:6), can God justify us by taking away our guilt—and perceive us as having lived the Law perfectly. Thus, Jesus’ life in us, the God-man Who carried out the Law perfectly, allows the Father to view us as “*doers of the Law.*” We will deal with this wonderful truth in more detail in Romans 5.

The statements, “*do instinctively the things of the Law*” (Romans 2:14) and “*they show the work of the Law written in their hearts*” (Romans 2:15), are challenging to interpret. If they point to the work of the Holy Spirit in a New Testament believer, these Gentiles are believers. If they address the moral law written on the conscience of every man, these Gentiles are unbelievers. Several scholars agree with the second interpretation due to Romans 2:16, which speaks of the judgment of the ungodly at the “*great white throne*” (Revelation 20:11). No believer will face this judgment, yet the individuals of Romans 2:14-15 seem to be present when this judgment occurs, in which case, they are lost and without eternal life. “*The secrets of*” the lost will be judged (Romans 2:16, Revelation 20:11-15); no sin or motive will be veiled, not even among the “*morally pure*” who have (due to a choice of their own) rejected Christ. All sin will be exposed.

***The Unbelieving Jew will be Condemned***

The second half of this chapter, consisting of verses 17-29, explains why the unbelieving Jew will be condemned. Up to now the Jews could say, “Preach on, Paul. We are in total agreement.” But Paul had not yet addressed, in depth at least, why the unbelieving Jew will receive God’s wrath. The Hebrew male normally viewed himself as right with God based on three counts: (1) He was a Jew (2) He had been circumcised (3) The Jewish nation had received the Law—and he was part of that nation. All or any of these avenues provided passage to heaven as far as the average Jew was concerned. Paul disagrees and spends the remainder of the chapter, along with part of the next, explaining why.

In verses 17-24, Paul mentions the disparity between possessing the Law and living by its requirements. In fact, he writes that those “*who boast*” about possessing “*the Law...dishonor God*” “*through...breaking*” the Law’s commands (v.23)!

Since the unbelieving Hebrews assumed that their Jewishness made them part of God’s family, Paul writes:

*But if you bear the name “Jew,” and rely upon the Law, and boast in God,*  
(Romans 2:17)

The unbelieving Jew also viewed himself as knowing God’s “*will*” and approving “*the things that are excellent*” due to possessing “*the Law*” (Romans 2:18). As a result, he considered himself “*a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness*” (Romans 2:19), as well as “*a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature*” (Romans 2:20). A problem existed, however, for he was guilty of the same sin that he condemned in others (Romans 2:21-22)—which brought gross “*dishonor*” to God’s name (Romans 2:23). Thus, Paul wrote:

*For “THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU,” just as it is written.* (Romans 2:24)

Next, Paul addresses the subject of circumcision in Romans 2:25. Due to misguided thinking, the unbelieving Jew viewed “*circumcision*” as a guarantee of salvation. This arrangement could not be the case, for Abraham was circumcised after he was declared righteous (read Genesis 15:6 and Genesis 17:24). Actually, circumcision was given to the Jewish nation as “*a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he [Abraham] had while uncircumcised*” (Romans 4:11). In other words, circumcision was a reminder to the Jewish nation that repentance and faith, exercised in one’s depraved (lost) state, result in God granting salvation. Paul wrote:

*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.*  
(Romans 2:25)

Paul was quick to mention that “*circumcision*” could result in salvation only if the one circumcised kept the Law perfectly. However, Romans 3:20 and 28 verify that salvation is impossible to obtain through the “*works of the Law*”:

*because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:20)*

*For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. (Romans 3:28)*

The Law, which the unbelieving Jew relied upon to grant passageway to heaven (Romans 2:17), was incapable of providing salvation even for a Jew. Its purpose was to convict the lost, Jew and Gentile alike, of their need for a Savior so they might be “justified” by God subsequent to exercising repentance and “faith” while depraved:

*Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. (Galatians 3:24)*

Therefore, Paul confirms that to break the Law in one point makes physical “circumcision” “uncircumcision” for those who trust in “circumcision” for salvation:

*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. (Romans 2:25)*

Every person breaks that Law in some fashion (Romans 3:20; 1John 1:8); yet Jesus, the sinless God-man, kept it perfectly (2Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15). Do not overlook this critical fact, for it will serve us well as we continue.

Romans 2:26-27 proves that New Testament Gentile believers, even though physically “uncircumcised,” are perceived by God as having kept “the requirements of the Law.” As a result, He views their “uncircumcision” as “circumcision.”

*If therefore the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? And will not 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? (Romans 2:26-27)*

God can perceive physically “uncircumcised” New Testament Gentile believers as having kept “the requirements of the Law” because Jesus, who kept the Law perfectly, lives inside them (Galatians 2:20). Additional benefits accompany this wonderful reality. Because Jesus’ presence is within them, along with the presence of the Holy Spirit, their behavior begins to line up with the righteous “requirement of the Law” (Romans 8:4)—a subject covered in considerable detail later.