

Bible Study # 14

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Romans 2

Romans 2

- **Romans 2:1-4** *“Therefore you have no excuse, old man, whoever you are, when you judge another; for in passing judgment upon him you condemn yourself, Do you not know that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?”*
 - Paul is telling the members of the Church in Rome that they are condemning themselves whether they are Gentile pagan worshipers or Jews whose ancestors worshipped pagan gods
 - He is calling on the Jews to look back at their history*

Romans 2 (Cont)

- **Romans 2:5-11** *“But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed....For God shows no partiality.”*
 - Paul is saying that it does not matter whether they are Jews or Gentiles, for at the end of life God will raise them from the dead and judge them
 - Based on what they have done in their lives for whether worshiping the golden calf or Zeus will make no difference
 - It will make no difference whether they kept the “natural law” as a Gentile or the “natural ” and “special law” as a Jew
 - Therefore, the Jews first and then the Gentile will be judged based on their culpability*

Romans 2 (Cont)

- **Romans 2:12-22** *“All who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sin under the law will be judged by the law. For is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law will be justified... You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?”*
 - Wherever you see the word “**Law**”, in Paul’s Letter or in Acts **think of it as meaning the “Torah”**
 - This will help remove the confusion that has arisen with the English word “Law” from theological and Reformation language and understandings
 - Paul is trying to teach those in the Church of Rome that just because they have lived, heard, or preached the Law (Torah), they may not have actually done what it says

Romans 2 (Cont)

- Look at what Jesus says in **Mt 7:26**
 - “And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand”
- The ***Book of Leviticus*** instructs the Jews of the requirements for sacrificing animals
- Understanding the purpose of this law we find that animal sacrifice was found in all religions of that day as a part of “natural law”
- This practice can be seen as a part of the catechism of almost all of the religions of that time

Romans 2 (Cont)

- Paul is pointing out the Jews in the Church in Rome that the Gentile is keeping the Torah if he
 - Never hates his brother
 - Never commits adultery
 - Never kills anyone
 - Offers sacrifices to God
 - Prays often
- After all, Paul says, what the Torah calls one to do is to **love God and neighbor**
- So, as Jesus says, if one does these things he is fulfilling the Torah

Romans 2 (Cont)

- Paul concludes that:
 - Some of the Gentiles are actually keeping the Torah even if they do not actually know its precepts
 - There is a level playing field and if the Jews want to rely on **the Torah**, they had better keep all of its precepts because the Torah **makes them more culpable***

Romans 2 (Cont)

- **Romans 2:23-24** *“You will boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law?...For it is written, ‘The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.’”*
 - Originally Paul has been speaking to both groups in the Church in Rome, but at this point his argument is primarily focused on the Jews

Romans 2 (Cont)

- In most of the Churches Paul founded, including the Church of Rome, the Jews were the initial seeds that formed the Church
 - They knew the Torah, salvation history, the prophets
 - They spoke Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek
 - Some may have been at the first Pentecost in Jerusalem
 - Became the official “clergy” of the Church

Romans 2 (Cont)

- As these Churches continued to grow more and more Gentiles entered
 - But the **Jews remained in charge**
- Therefore, Paul asks the Jewish leaders:
 - If they think that they are all high and mighty because they know and teach the Torah?
 - If they have ever sinned?
- As so many of their ancestors who, after God had revealed himself to them and made them his own special people, committed the sin of worshiping other gods

Romans 2 (Cont)

- This is discussed in **Jeremiah 2:11** where the prophet asks:
 - If one looks to the East and West will he see any nation who has changed its gods?
 - Yet it was the Jewish people who had been called to worship the living God and then walked away to worship things that were no gods at all (the golden calf)
 - Did not the Jews reject the fountain of life and hew out for themselves wells that have no water or produced broken cisterns that hold no water – worship of idols
- **Is this not the history of Israel?**

Romans 2 (Cont)

- Paul is reminding the Jews in the Church of Rome that the people of God were called in order to be a **“light to the nations”**, (Is 42:6; 49:6) instead they refused to obey and blasphemed in the name of God*

Romans 2 (Cont)

- **Romans 2:25** *“Circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law; but if you break the law, you’re circumcision becomes un-circumcision.”*
 - Paul is reminding them that “**circumcision**” puts one into the **covenant with God** requiring them to obey **all 613 laws** of the Torah
 - Paul asks if one fails to obey the laws then what is the point of being circumcised?
 - And if an uncircumcised man keeps the precepts of the Torah will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?*

Romans 2 (Cont)

- **Romans 2:26-29** *“So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his own circumcision be regarded as circumcision?...His praise is not from men but from God.”*
 - Most likely the Jews in the Church of Rome would have to agreed with Paul’s argument since this is exactly what **Deuteronomy 10** says:
 - Moses calls the people to circumcise their hearts
 - Circumcision in the flesh is nice but if one worships another god what does the circumcision in the flesh accomplish?
 - Paul is pointing out how **“circumcision of the heart”** was what was important to the **“God-fearers” on Mt Sinai**
 - Paul’s arguments **continue into Romans 3**

Romans 3

Romans 3

- **Romans 3:1** *“Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision?”*
 - Imagine what the **Christian Jew** in the Church of Rome thought as he listened to this tirade?
 - *First, they must have wondered why God gave them the “special revelation”?*
 - *Then, whether it mattered if they were circumcised or not*
 - Was Paul saying that all that mattered was that one followed God’s Law
 - If that was the case, then even a Gentile could be saved
 - So why did God give the Jews the Law in the first place?
 - Paul understands their questions and responds in the next verse*

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Romans 3 (Cont)

- **Romans 3:2-8** *“Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews are entrusted with the oracles of God... Their condemnation is just.”*
 - Paul is aware that people are twisting his words and talking badly about him
 - Paul was saying that **because of the sins of the people, God’s graces abound**
 - They might have wondered that if that was the case, perhaps they should sin more so there could receive more grace!
 - But that was **not what Paul was saying***

Romans 3 (Cont)

- **Romans 3:9-18** *“What then? Are we Jews any better off?...There is no fear of God before their eyes.”*
 - Paul has just told them that **the Jews** and the **history of Israel are important** because they had received the oracles from God
 - To prove his point that all humans are enslaved to sin, Paul quotes from scripture by stringing together several passages from the Old Testament depicting sinfulness of all human beings

Romans 3 (Cont)

- He reminds them that the **wonderful gifts to humanity included** the Law, the prophets, the Psalms, all of which **came from God to Israel** His chosen people
- Paul is also talking about **humanity in general** and pointing out that for the most part it is wicked*

Romans 3 (Cont)

- **Romans 3:19-20** *“Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.”*
 - As always we must keep track of the “context” when reading Acts and the letters of Paul
 - Antioch of Syria, Antioch of Pisidia, or Antioch
 - Works of the Law, good works, or works

Romans 3 (Cont)

- But what happens when Paul just says “works”?
- To understand we must read it carefully within its context
- Many times Paul will say “works” and a few verses later he will say “good works”, or “works of the Law”
- Unfortunately, many people do not know this background and are not able to follow what he is saying

Romans 3 (Cont)

- ***Works of the Law***
 - Circumcision and the Kosher Laws
- ***Good works:***
 - Works that are in accord with the will of God
 - Things that further sanctify a person
 - The manifestation of God's Spirit within
 - Things that one does on the other side of the baptismal font
- After coming out of the baptismal font one has been saved and now walks in that salvation in the ways of Jesus
- It is not that “good works” save us, but that we participate in our salvation by doing these things

Romans 3 (Cont)

- Coming out of the Baptismal font we are saved and now we walk in that salvation in the ways of Jesus Christ
- Thus, the things we do are “good works” in contrast to the evil things we did before being baptized such as worshiping pagan idols

Romans 3 (Cont)

- Paul builds on his view of the Torah as stated in **Rom 2:19** where he said that it is as **a light in the darkness**
- Through “natural revelation” an average Gentile could discover certain things while fumbling around and bumping into things in the darkness
- But the Jew has the **light of the Torah** to help overcome the darkness

Romans 3 (Cont)

- Paul is saying that the Torah is a lamp by which one can clearly discern the things that the Gentile was fumbling around trying to discover
- Although some times even with the help of the light (Torah), the Jew might still use creation for something that it was not intended for and thus commit a sin
- The Torah **will not stop him** but having it makes the Jew more culpable before God than the Gentile*

Romans 3 (Cont)

- **Romans 3:21-23** *“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, ...since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”*
 - One is saved by the fact that Jesus died and arose from the dead
 - When one is baptized into the body of Christ in the church it is Jesus who is baptizing you
 - Your salvation is therefore due to Jesus and him alone
 - Circumcision and keeping the Kosher laws are all things that one does for himself
 - They are things that one agrees to have done or chooses to do to be obedient to the Law*

Romans 3 (Cont)

- **Romans 3:24-25** *“They are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as **an expiation** by his blood, to be received by faith.”*
 - Paul frequently uses **metaphors in his letters**
 - When Paul speaks of Jesus serving as an **expiation**, many confusing explanations have arisen
 - Expiation means that Jesus has died, but in a manner that can be understood from the Old Testament understanding of the Day of Atonement

Romans 3 (Cont)

- This was where, once a year, the High Priest:
- Took the blood from one of two sacrificial goats and sprinkled it inside the Holy of Holies to cover over the sins of the people
- He then prayed the sins of the people of Israel over the second goat (the scape goat) and released it into the wilderness symbolizing the departure of the sins of the people from the community

Romans 3 (Cont)

- This practice is discussed in the **Book of Leviticus** where it was understood that the “sins of the people” had infected the Tent of Meeting and could only be cleansed by the High Priest sprinkling of the life blood of the goat inside the Holy of Holies
- Also, the scape goat has all the sins of the people prayed over its head by the High Priest before it is released in the desert symbolizing the taking away their sins
- Paul uses the metaphor of the Day of Atonement to demonstrate how Jesus, as the Lamb of God, sheds his blood and cleanses us (temple) of our sins

Romans 3 (Cont)

- When people take a metaphor and try to make it into reality the entire thing falls apart
- Obviously Jesus is not a goat
- But he is seen by Paul of serving the role of the goat cleansing the Holy of Holies and the “scape goat” taking away the sins of all the people
- Elsewhere we hear of Jesus being called by John the Baptist “the lamb of God” symbolizing the Passover lamb
- These are very beautiful metaphors*

Romans 3 (Cont)

- **Romans 3:26-27** *“it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus. Then what has become of **our** boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On the **principle of works**? No, but on the **principle of faith.**”*
 - “Our” refers to all Jews
 - At that time “Jew” referred to the people of Judea, and Paul was a Benjaminite
 - But The Gentiles would have referred to all the Israelites as “Jews”
 - Even Paul, in the Book of Acts refers to himself as a “Jew”

Romans 3 (Cont)

- Paul is in a debate with an imaginary interlocutor
- The entire question of unmerited justification or salvation is now put in terms of “boasting”
- This is the human tendency to rely on one’s own powers and to think that thereby one can achieve salvation or justification in the sight of God

Romans 3 (Cont)

- Here, Paul is contrasting the **works of the Law** versus **faith in Jesus** and the New Covenant
- When Paul refers to works of the Law, he is talking about one putting his faith in Moses and the Torah
- Faith in the Torah would not save them
- But if they put their faith in Jesus and the new covenant, nothing else was needed for salvation
- As we know the Jews in the Church of Rome kept telling the Gentiles that they had to add circumcision and Kosher to be saved
- This meant that they did not trust in Jesus and the New Covenant for salvation

Romans 3 (Cont)

- It would be like one saying after coming out of the Baptismal font, the Gentile still needed to keep Kosher to be saved
- That would mean that their faith and trust was actually and ultimately dependent on the Torah
- **Romans 3:27 – 4:15** should be studied as a single and very important section*

Romans 3 (Cont)

- **Romans 3:28** *“For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law the works.”*
 - Look at **Rom 3:27** where Paul speaks of “works” versus “faith” in contrast to what he says here about “faith” versus “works of the law (Torah)”
 - We must read these passages very carefully because in other places Paul will be talking about “works” when he is talking about the post Baptismal “good works” of a convert to Christianity
 - In the vast majority of times when Paul says “works” by itself he is talking about the “works of the law” (Torah)

Romans 3 (Cont)

- In **Acts 15:1** we heard about some men who came to Antioch from Jerusalem stating that it was nice that the Gentiles were being baptized, but they must also be circumcised and keep Kosher in order to be saved
- We saw this same argument in the letter to the Galatians
- Paul accused them of trying to add things to the new covenant of Jesus from the old covenant thus indicating a lack of faith in the new covenant
- Jesus is the new covenant in which he, as God, unites himself to man

Romans 3 (Cont)

- Paul says that if we are in Jesus we are united with God because Jesus is our salvation
- **Du 6:4 (the Shema)** implies that there is only one God and thus it does not matter whether one is circumcised or uncircumcised, Jew or Gentile
- Paul is telling the Church of Rome that there **is only one way to be saved** and that is through the blood of Christ and faith in the New Covenant*

Romans 3 (Cont)

- **Romans 3:29-30** *“Or is God the God of the Jews only? Is he not the God of the Gentiles also?...and the uncircumcised through their faith.”*
 - Paul is pointing out that God created all people
 - He points out that some believe that the Jews were first because they were the ones who keep the works of the law
 - But, he goes on to say that God also created the Gentiles (Gn 6:4) and thus circumcision or uncircumcision does not matter
 - There is only one God and one way to be saved and that is through faith in the new covenant of Jesus*

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Romans 3 (Cont)

- **Romans 3:31** *“Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, **we uphold the law.**”*
 - Father Sebastian asked if we could imagine a dialogue between two Jewish Christians in the Church of Rome who just heard this part of the letter?
 - They must wonder how Paul could say that circumcision does not matter
 - They understood Paul to have said that “faith” in Jesus Christ was all that mattered
 - To them “faith” was what one thinks intellectually, not what one does

Romans 3 (Cont)

- This misunderstanding becomes part of the **Pelagius - Augustine** debate that was misread by Luther and tragically today many understand it this way
- But this is the farthest thing from what Paul is saying here
- He was not talking about what you think in your head vs what you do
- Rather, he was talking about two different covenants, two different ways of being saved
 - The old way was through the covenant of Moses
 - The new way is through the covenant of Jesus

Romans 3 (Cont)

- This new covenant not need anything added to it from the old covenant
- Further, if one adds to it from the old covenant then one is not putting faith in the new covenant
- If one attempts to add circumcision and kosher to the new covenant you are not in accord with the calling of Jesus Christ
- One does not overthrow the law of the Torah by faith in the new covenant, rather one fulfills it as will be evident from Romans 4
-