

1. **Introduction**: In verses 1:18-32, Paul provided a picture of the dark side of the ancient Gentile world. It didn't represent all Gentiles. Not all Gentiles preferred darkness to light, worshiped idols, or were "given up by God" to sexually and socially promiscuous evil.
 - There were exceptions like Seneca, the Stoic moralist of Paul's time.
 - Seneca believed in the great moral virtues, taught equality of all people, exposed hypocrisy, taught the pervasive character of evil, practiced the things he believed, taught, and lived the role of a moral guide.
 - Very likely, Paul has people similar to Seneca in mind in verses 2:1-16 when he turns from critiquing the world of shameless immorality to critiquing self-conscious moralism.
 - Paul teaches that God's judgment is inescapable, righteous, and impartial.
 - Having critiqued (in 2:1-16) segments of humanity that included both Jews and Gentiles, Paul, in verses 2:17-24 begins a critique specifically of people who call themselves Jews.
 - The Jews seem to be in a preferred position. They have been given both the Law and circumcision (the sign of the Covenant) and chosen by God to be His special people.
2. **Romans 2:17-20**: *But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God¹⁸ and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law;¹⁹ and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,²⁰ an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth.*
 - Paul defines some of what it means to be a Jew. His focus continues to be demonstrating that both Jews and Gentiles are sinners needing a savior. The Jews have been given several advantages but none guarantee Jewish immunity from divine judgment.
 - Many Jews believed that being under the law of Moses, given to them by God, would protect them from being judged for personal sinfulness. Paul says, you are mistaken.
 - Though Paul specifically addresses the Jews (the most religious people of his day), his message applies also to Christians. How does the observed belief and behavior of people who claim to be "God's people" relate to God's requirements?
 - Paul speaks to the Jews about self-confidence: (1.) You call yourself a Jew being proud to be one of God's chosen people. (2.) You rely on the Law God gave at Sinai, trusting it to be a shield against disaster. (3.) You boast about your relationship with God. (4.) You know God's will. (5.) You approve of what is excellent, because you have been instructed in the Law. (6.) Your instruction in the Law convinced you that you are competent to instruct others, a guide to the blind, a light to those in darkness. It is true that in the Law you have an embodiment of knowledge and truth.
 - Despite all their advantages, Jews have a problem. Like everyone else, they fail to live up to their knowledge. That is a problem. (2:13) *For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.*
 - Like everyone else, they fail to live by the moral knowledge God has given them.

3. **Romans 2:21-24:** *You then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? ²² You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³ You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. ²⁴ For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”*
- These comments by Paul concern actions. The comments and questions:
 - (1.) Are you a knowledgeable teacher of God’s moral Law, do you practice what you teach, being obedient to the truth? (2.) You teach against stealing. Do you steal? (3.) You teach that committing adultery is against God’s Law. Do you commit adultery? (4.) You teach against idolatry and abhor idols. Do you take and use things used in the worship of idols? (5.) The truth is, that you who boast about the Law (as did Jews), dishonor God by breaking the Law. It is written that, *“The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”*
 - Paul’s message is that “apart from Christ” you are condemned. You will be saved by being “in Christ.” You can be “in Christ” only through authentic belief in Christ. In the absence of belief, no other activity, membership, or ancestry is sufficient.
 - No matter how spectacular your religious ritual or liturgy, no matter how awesome the doctrine, no matter how great the fellowship in your group, no matter what signs of devotion you bear in your body, and no matter how much you have knowledge and ability to teach others, all is of no avail apart from Christ.
 - Salvation is from God through Christ alone by faith alone. Scripture alone is now the source of the truth of the Gospel.
4. **Romans 2:25-29:** *For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. ²⁶ So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? ²⁷ Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. ²⁸ For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. ²⁹ But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.*
- Circumcision is a sign of admission into the Covenant between God and His people.
 - Jewish belief was that circumcision has saving power. Mosaic Law requires that male babies be circumcised on the eighth day after birth (Leviticus 12:3).
 - Paul argues circumcision itself does not assure exemption from God’s judgement. The effectiveness of circumcision depends on obedience to the Law.
 - Paul says, *“For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision.”*
 - Circumcision is the sign of Covenant membership. Being included in the Covenant demands obedience. Circumcision and obedience to the Law belong together.

- Circumcision becomes uncircumcision if the Law is disobeyed. That causes the person who disobeys to lose their position as a participant in God’s Covenant.
- Paul does say “obedience saves.” Rather, obedience is a sign of salvation.
- Paul says that “circumcision minus obedience is equal to uncircumcision.” He then says that “uncircumcision plus obedience” equals circumcision. The uncircumcised by obedience to God’s moral Law become as though circumcised.
- Jews and Gentiles are both exposed to God’s judgment. Obedience to God’s moral law is the key to avoiding God’s judgment and wrath.
- Paul makes the startling statement, ***“he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law.”*** Gentiles judging Jews. Gentiles judging God’s chosen people! How is that possible?
- Paul’s answer is, ***“no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. ²⁹ But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.”***
- The concept is that being a Jew ethnically is important because Jews are God’s chosen people, but being a Jew inwardly is vital and overrides the ethnic criteria.
- An inward Jew is a person who is inwardly responsive and obedient to God. Their circumcision is of the spiritual heart, not of the flesh. They may be ethnic Gentiles.
- Circumcision of the spiritual heart is not carried out by people. It is done by God and is not of the flesh. The approval (praise) for being a person with a circumcised heart comes not from men, but from God Himself. Such a person is God’s workmanship.
- In the OT God promises He will circumcise hearts of people so that they may love Him with all their being (Lev 26:41; Dt 10:16, 3:6).
- Gentiles are described as uncircumcised in heart and flesh. There are also people who are circumcised in the flesh but do not have circumcised hearts.
- People circumcised only in the flesh and those uncircumcised in neither heart or flesh are subject to God’s judgment and wrath.
- Circumcision of the spiritual heart is an inward work of the Holy Spirit, a result obedience to the written Law can never achieve. God is concerned that we experience in our spiritual hearts that deep inward work of the Holy Spirit.
- Fleshly circumcision is a “sign” given to signify membership in God’s Covenant.
- Stott points out that what Paul writes here about circumcision and being a Jew could also be said about baptism and being a Christian. True Christian baptism is of the spiritual heart and is done by the Holy Spirit.
- Water baptism is the outward sign given to signify the inward reality has occurred.
- Paul’s position on the Law and Circumcision will seem to some to be an outrageous attack on the foundations of Judaism.
- In the next few verses, Paul responds to questions he believes might be troubling some of his Jewish readers using a well-known literary convention.

- He first poses questions that might be asked, and then answers them.
5. **Romans 3:1-8:** *Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? ² Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. ³ What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? ⁴ By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written, “That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged.” ⁵ But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.) ⁶ By no means! For then how could God judge the world? ⁷ But if through my lie God’s truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? ⁸ And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.*
- These verses likely represent Paul’s insight as a Pharisee, arguing with Paul’s new insight after he was converted.
 - Paul, personally, knew both sides of the question, “what advantage has the Jew?” When a Pharisee, Paul considered his position was advantageous before God in every way. Then he met the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. Everything changed!
 - Here, the Jewish/Christian dialog includes few details. A fuller picture is in Rm 9-11.
 - In Rm 2:25-29 we have the part of Paul’s teaching that caused Jewish objections. Paul says, (1.) There is no fundamental difference between Jews and Gentiles. (2.) The law, and circumcision provide neither Jewish identity as the people of God or Jewish immunity from judgment by God.
 - These comments raised questions about the validity of God’s covenant, promises, and character. Paul deals with objections as 4 related but distinct questions.
 - **Objection 1:** Does Paul’s teaching undermine God’s Covenant (3:1-2)? No. Paul agrees that God chose Israel out of the nations, made a covenant with them, and gave circumcision as the sign and seal of that covenant. But Jesus gave the Covenant new meaning.
 - Because of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, the meaning of “Jew’s as God’s chosen people” must be redefined. Further, circumcision also has a new/old meaning.
 - Do Paul’s “new definitions” eliminate any advantage of being a Jew by the old definition, and what value is there in the old intent and meaning of circumcision.
 - The fact that being an ethnic Jew does not protect a person from God’s judgment does not mean that being an ethnic Jew has no value. Ethnic Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God, the very words of God.
 - The oracles of God entrusted to Israel included not only God’s commandments and promises but the entire OT revelation that contains them.
 - This highly privileged responsibility was given to Israel’s ethnic Jews and no other.
6. **Next Lesson:** Objections 2 – 4.