

# WHO NEEDS THE GOSPEL?

Romans 2:1-29

Are you *pecksniffian*?

You really don't want to be *pecksniffian* but if you are you probably don't see it.

People around you know if you're *pecksniffian*.

It's unpleasant to say the least.

Religious people are very susceptible to it.

It was a deep seated problem in Judaism. It's understandable why the Jews struggled with *pecksniffianism* given their special relationship with God:

Romans 9:4-5 (ESV)

<sup>4</sup> ...to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. <sup>5</sup> To them belong the patriarchs...

As a result of their unique relationship with God, the Jews fell prey to *pecksniffianism*; they became self-righteous. Their self-righteousness fostered an attitude of moral superiority and a presumption that God would not judge their sins by the same standard He judges the sins of non-Jews.

The self-righteousness of the Jews was not just ugly, it was deadly. Paul's concern for his fellow Jews was that in their self-righteousness they were blind to the fact that they, too, are under God's wrath.

Initially Paul scored points with the Jews by condemning Gentile sinners in 1:18-32.

Romans 1:28-32 (ESV)

<sup>28</sup> And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. <sup>29</sup> They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, <sup>30</sup> slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, <sup>31</sup> foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. <sup>32</sup> Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

In condemning the Gentiles Paul sounded like one of them. The Jews liked what Paul had to say so far.

But then comes chapter two.

Paul confronts the self-righteousness of the Jews in hopes they will realize they too, are under God's wrath and need deliverance. They need the Gospel every bit as much as the Gentiles.

Paul first confronts the Jewish mindset that *knowing* God's Law placed them in a position of moral superiority to judge others and that knowing God's Law insulated them from God's judgment. Paul cuts through their judgmentalism and presumption with the truth that God judges both Jews and Gentiles based on what they do, not on what they *know*.

## I. God Judges Based On What We DO Not On What We Know (2:1-16)

Romans 2:1-16 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. <sup>2</sup> We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. <sup>3</sup> Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? <sup>4</sup> Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? <sup>5</sup> But because of 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.

The Jews used a double standard in judging others. They were deluded thinking that because they knew God's Law they would not be judged for their sins like the Gentiles. Paul warns them they will be held to

the same standard and exhorts them to repent in light of God's kindness which refers either to God's kindness in forestalling immediate and final judgment or His kindness in calling the Jews into a unique relationship with Himself. Whatever the case, Paul calls the Jews to have a change of mind and understand that God will judge them not on what they know, but on what they do. He drives this home in verses 6-12.

<sup>6</sup> He will render to each one according to his works: <sup>7</sup> to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; <sup>8</sup> but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. <sup>9</sup> There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, <sup>10</sup> but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. <sup>11</sup> For God shows no partiality.

*God shows no partiality.* God will judge Jews and Gentiles by the same standard; by their works. The Jews saw themselves as those who did good and were seeking glory and honor and immortality and would receive eternal life. But the only way they could see themselves this way was by redefining the standard of God's judgment, by excusing their sin based on their knowledge of the Law. But the standard is sinless obedience to God's Law. This is the basis of God's judgment. God will render to each one according to his works. If there is a Jew or Gentile who perfectly obeys God's Law without one violation, God will reward him or her eternal life. But no such Jew or Gentile exists (except Jesus). All have sinned.

<sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. <sup>14</sup> For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. <sup>15</sup> They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them <sup>16</sup> on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

At the Great White Throne Judgment, God will not judge people on the basis of who they are (Jew or Gentile). God will judge people on the basis of what they have done with the amount of revelation they have been given. The Jews, who had been given the revelation of God's Law, will be judged in terms of their obedience to the Law. The Gentiles, who did not receive the Law, will be judged according to that which they know to be right and wrong. The Jews will be judged by their obedience to the objective standard of the Law, while Gentiles will be judged by their obedience to the subjective standard of their moral conscience. At the Great White Throne Judgment it will be evident that every Jew and every Gentile violated their standard.

Jews need the Gospel every bit as much as Gentiles.

Just as *knowing* God's Law will not deliver the Jews from God's wrath so also their *chosen status* will not deliver.

## II. God Judges Based On What We DO Not On Our *Chosen Status* (2:17-29)

<sup>17</sup> But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God <sup>18</sup> and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law; <sup>19</sup> and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, <sup>20</sup> an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth— <sup>21</sup> you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? <sup>22</sup> You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? <sup>23</sup> You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. <sup>24</sup> For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

God's intent for the Jewish people, for Israel, was to be a light to the nations. By living in obedience to God's Law they were to model God's righteousness, justice, truth and compassion to all who came in contact with their culture. They *were* to teach the nations because the Law is *the embodiment of knowledge and truth*.

But again, their *chosen status* lead to hypocrisy – "do what we teach, not what we do". They seemed to believe their *chosen status* insulated them from God's judgment. Rather than God's name being exalted

among the Gentiles on account of the good and righteous character of His Chosen People; God's name was blasphemed because of their hypocrisy.

One of the core symptoms of self-righteousness is *externalism*; valuing rituals and symbols while disregarding their meaning. The Jews' perspective on circumcision was yet another expression of their self-righteousness and separation from God.

<sup>25</sup> For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. <sup>26</sup> So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? <sup>27</sup> Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. <sup>28</sup> For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. <sup>29</sup> 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.

Male circumcision is the physical sign of the Abrahamic Covenant. It was a source of Jewish pride: a symbol of their *chosen status*. The meaning of the symbol had been lost. Cutting off symbolized consecration, being cut off from all other gods and the ways of the world to be fully consecrated to God. The Jews were proud of their circumcision, but lived in a manner completely contrary to its meaning. God is more concerned about the internal condition of the heart while the Jews were more concerned about the external body. What does God want from the Jews? He wants them to be both circumcised and consecrated to Him. Another indication they were not right with God.

Paul's purpose in Romans 2:1-29 is to break through the self-righteous blindness of the Jews to show them that they, too, are under God's wrath and need the Gospel as much as the Gentiles. Contrary to the double standard of the Jews, God judges all peoples impartially based on their works. Jews will be judged according to the objective standard of God's Law – and they will be found guilty. Gentiles will be judged according to the subjective standard of their moral conscience – and they, too, will be found guilty.

Contrary to their *pecksniffian* perspective, the Jews will not be judged based on what they *know* nor on their *chosen status* but on their works; their obedience to God's Law. As Paul shows, they are guilty of violating God's Law and therefore *storing up wrath* for themselves on the day of God's judgment.

The Jews need the Gospel every bit as much as the Gentiles!

It's possible for some of us to suffer the same mindset as the Jews. We may have been raised in a Christian home, attended church all our lives, possess significant Bible knowledge and are able to clearly explain the Gospel of Jesus Christ and by these things think we are in a right relationship with God. But if we have never come to the end of ourselves, recognized our sinful condition and separation from God and placed all of our faith in Jesus and His blood sacrifice for forgiveness then we're just as self-righteous and condemned as the Jews of Romans 2. It's not what you *know*. It's not how you were *raised*. It's not attending and even serving in church that makes you right with God. None of these things changes the fact that God judges you on your works – are you obeying His Law perfectly? You're not. You're storing up wrath for yourself on the day of God's wrath. You need to be saved. Jesus paid the penalty for your sin. Put all your trust and dependence on Him and you will be saved.

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#### QUESTION:

- It has been observed that the self-righteous are the hardest to reach with the Gospel. Why is this?

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**NEXT WEEK:** Romans 3:1-20