

Studies in Romans

Outlaws and Inlaws (2:12-24)

Context

- **1:1-17 Introduction**
 - 1:1-5 Paul's greeting and a summary of the gospel
 - 1:6-15 Paul's relationship with the Romans
 - 1:16-17 Paul's thesis: God's gospel is powerful to save all who believe
- **1:18-4:25 The problem and God's solution**
 - 1:18-3:20 The problem: God's wrath at our unrighteousness
 - 1:18-32 Mankind is facing God's wrath, both now and, ultimately, in the future, because we have all rebelled against Him
 - 2:1-3:20 There are no exceptions and no excuses; even the Jews are sinners who face God's wrath

Unanswered questions to consider:

- "Yes, but I'm not as bad as that!"
- "Yes, but I'm a Jew—one of God's chosen people!"
- "How is God going to solve this problem *righteously*?"

Last week we saw that God's wrath righteously falls upon "respectable sinners." But what about the Jews? Surely they're acceptable before God, right?

Paul's point in this section is that God shows no partiality (**v. 11**). The Jewish person tended to think that they had a big advantage before God because he had the Mosaic Law.

Note the little word "for" in **v. 12**. *What's the connection with the previous verses?*

Verse 12: *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.*

First we should clarify here what Paul means by "the law." Paul is referring to **the whole written system of instructions given to Moses on mount Sinai at the time just after the exodus from Egypt.**

Here's a list of excellent points from Michael Eaton regarding **v. 12**:

1. **Sin still exists even when the Mosaic Law is not known.**
2. **The absence of the law does not affect the "punishment" of the unsaved person.**
3. **The Mosaic Law never was given to Gentiles.**

See also **1 Corinthians 9:20-21** and **Ephesians 2:11-22**.

4. **Jews who do have the *Torah* (the Jewish term for the whole law) will be judged in terms of their situation, the specific commands God laid upon them.**
5. **Unsaved Jews will be condemned for breaches of the Mosaic Law.**

6. The punishment of sin is “perishing” – utter ruination.

General principle: God demands more of the person who has been instructed. See also **Luke 12:41-48**.

Verse 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.*

What matters?

Again, is Paul saying that people can somehow be saved by their good works—by their obedience to the law of God? See **Rom. 3:19-20**. Keep Paul’s main point in mind: his main concern here is not to show how people are saved but *to show why it is that everyone is condemned* including the Jew who was so proud of his having the Mosaic Law.

Now Paul gets a little bit deeper. The Gentiles don’t have the Mosaic Law. But they’re not off the hook! Paul declares that those who sin outside of the law will still perish. How can that be? **Verses 14-16** explain the reason:

Paul is dealing with an objection here. People might say: “Isn’t it unfair of God to hold people morally accountable and to judge them for failure to obey a “law” of which they are ignorant?”

Let’s go on...

Are these moral and upright and respectable people, are they so upright? Are they as nice and clean-living as they would have us suppose? Well, they boast about a whole list of things (**vv. 17-20**), ah, but they are full of subtle sins (**vv. 21-24**).

Their boast (vv. 17-20)

Look at vv. 17-20: what things did these people boast about?

Their name (Jew – Judean).

The Mosaic Law

They even boasted “in God.” How could that be?

Their knowledge of God’s will.

The felt that they were:

“a light to those in darkness”

“an instructor of the foolish”

“a teacher of children”

Their behaviour (vv. 21-24)

The respectable Jew of the ancient world was proud of his possession of God's law but was often guilty of hypocrisy. Remind you of anyone?

Now note the logical sequence in Paul's argument in **vv. 17-21a**. "But if...and if...and if...etc., you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself?" And then comes this string of questions, zeroing in on their hypocrisy, from **v. 21b** on.

Note the examples Paul provides:

- Their teaching
- Their stealing
- Committing adultery
- Robbing temples
- And their boasting in the Law

Notice Paul's conclusion in **v. 24**: *For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."*

So, far from being a light to the Gentiles, what are they?

Note **two unanswered questions**:

- If God judges the Jews (and we'll talk more about them next week from **vv. 25-29**), isn't God undermining all that he promised to them in the Old Testament? What about His commitment to them?
- How can God righteously save *anyone*?

Don't forget Paul's main point in this section: we must realize that there is danger ahead for everyone! Everyone justly deserves God's wrath. Why? Because God judges us all on the basis of what we do.

For further discussion

In this passage we have looked at tonight, what difference does it make, having or not having the Law (vv. 12-16)? Why will the outcome be the same either way?

We have already seen that no-one will be immune from judgement because everyone has seen God's revelation in creation (1:19-20). What further evidence against "those who haven't heard" does Paul indicate in this passage?

There's a principle in vv. 12 and 13. What is that principle and how does Paul apply it in the section we've studied tonight?

*Judging by Paul's teaching from **Romans 1:18 to the end of chapter 2**, are there any grounds for hoping that we might be saved from God's wrath? Why/why not?*