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# Romans

**...for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, Romans 2:14**

Paul now introduces a supporting argument for what he just said in verse 13 by starting with “for when” –

...(for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; for when...

To clarify, he has made a claim against the Jews who trust in merely being the stewards of the law while failing to meet the law. Now he will demonstrate that what he said is correct. For when Gentiles (all who are not Jews) who do not have the law (the written code entrusted to the Jewish people by God), by nature do the things in the law (they obey what the law prescribes, such as “do not murder”), although not having the law (because it was given only to the nation of Israel), are a law to themselves (they have become “doers of the law” and thus prove his claim of verse 13).

There is no culture which has ever existed that was devoid of a moral law. Although the laws are enacted in varying degrees of strictness and enforced in varying degrees of severity, there is found to be a universal standard of overall moral right and wrong which is written on our hearts and imprinted on our consciences. When these internal codes are violated, a sense of guilt is the result.

In essence, the Gentiles are stewards of God's law, even if not written and detailed in the form given to Israel.

It is important to note that the word translated "when" in no way implies that what Paul is arguing will take place. Instead, it is a conjecture which links the two thoughts. The reason this is important is because even though obedience to this internal law may exist, it doesn't mean that it exists perfectly or that it will be executed flawlessly. Even more, the Bible consistently implies that it won't – "all have sinned and all fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

What this means then is that no person will be saved by the light he has received – for the Jew it was the Law of Moses, and for the gentile it is through the internal law of the heart and conscience. Instead, he will be judged by that light – greater judgment for the one with greater light. The light merely brings condemnation in varying degree. It is Christ who brings salvation in its fullness.

This concept of greater judgment for greater knowledge is hinted at in James 3:1. Although James is speaking to those who would presume to be teachers, the idea rings true with what Paul is telling us about in Romans –

"My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment."

All will be judged fairly based upon the light they have received and none will be able to accuse God of unfairness. All mouths will be stopped before Him and every tongue will be silenced. In the end, all people deserve God's hand of wrath and condemnation, but because of His great love with which He has loved us, we shall receive mercy if we come to the cross and the precious shed blood of Jesus.

Life application: Are you willing to gain greater light which will potentially increase your guilt before God? It is a scary thought, but the only acceptable answer for the follower of Jesus is, "Yes." It is unthinkable that we would want to keep

ourselves from knowing God in all His fullness just because we are scared of what we might learn about our own fallen state. Instead, when we learn more, we need to have our faith and actions coincide with our greater knowledge.

**...who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them)... Romans 2:15**

Paul states it as an axiom that when people by nature do the things which are found in the law, even though they don't have the law, they "show the work of the law written in their hearts." It's a validation that we know intuitively, although we exercise this in varying degrees of actual adherence, what God expects of us. The fact that we display these moral convictions shows that there must be an ultimate standard on which they are being compared. Though we may err in our reasoning about a moral issue, the moral standard exists.

Showing that this code is ingrained "in their hearts," their conscience then works with or against their actions; it bears witness to what they actually do. The Bible gives us insights into man's conscience in several ways –

In John 8:9 it says those who faced Jesus' pronouncement about being the first to stone the adulterous woman were convicted in their conscience. It is a tool of conviction.

In Acts 23:1, Paul claimed before the Sanhedrin that he "lived in all good conscience before God." It is a tool for right moral living.

In Romans 13:5, we are told to be subject to rulers, not only because of their wrath if we disobey, but merely for conscience' sake. It is a rule and guide within a societal framework because God ordains rulers of societies.

In 1 Corinthians 8:7-12, Paul notes that believers can have a weak conscience. This comes from a lack of knowledge about the truth of God's word. It is a part of man which must be corrected and strengthened through prayer and study.

In 1 Timothy 3:9, Paul tells Timothy to have a pure conscience. This would be living fully and completely within the ordinances of God and according to the word he has given. Right conscience is an attainable asset.

In the following chapter, 1 Timothy 4:2 tells us that those who reject God's truth can actually incur a seared conscience. It is something that can be completely twisted or even eradicated.

In Titus 1:15, Paul speaks of those who are corrupted and thus they have a defiled conscience. It is something that when misused can produce ungodliness and immorality.

These, and many other examples in Scripture, show us that the conscience is a powerful tool to be used in accordance with God's word or which will work against it. When exercised without God's word, the conscience of man, like his emotions, is one of the most uncertain faculties he possesses. If not reigned in, it will become seared as Paul describes and the person will move so far away from right morality that they become completely defiled. This is total depravity and complete enmity with God, striving against him on every moral issue.

Life application: Are you seeking to align your moral compass with God's word? If so, then you must first know God's word and then allow your conscience to lead you to right moral actions and convict you of incorrect ones. When this is properly effected, you will be living fully and completely within the ordinances of God.

**...in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel. Romans 2:16**

This verse ties directly back to verse 12. The intervening verses fill the thought out for us to comprehend the full extent of what the two surrounding verses state. Every person will be judged according to the amount of revealed light they have received. At Paul's time, it was Jew and Gentile; the Holy Scriptures and natural law; order and conscience; deeds for self or deeds of faith; etc. These will be considered and judgment will be rendered.

It needs to be noted again that although there are two categories flowing from Paul's pen – Jew and Gentile, there is now the church and the complete canon of Scripture. This is a sobering thought for us to consider. We now have a much fuller extent of God's revelation and are therefore more accountable for what we know. Imagine the guilt of the professor of biblical theology in a modern university who has, and teaches, both testaments of the Bible and yet discounts what he teaches as "one of many paths to God" or "just another ancient text written by man." Such an individual will be judged in the most severe way for diminishing the glory of which he was an especially important steward.

All of these things will be evaluated "in the day when God will judge the secrets of men." The Bible in numerous verses reveals that God searches the hearts and minds of man. It also states again and again that God will judge all people. Tying the two thoughts together supports what Paul states here. Judgment isn't only based on deed, but on thought and intent as well. Ecclesiastes 12:14 gives us one of many tastes of this –

For God will bring every work into judgment,  
Including every secret thing,  
Whether good or evil.

The ancient Greek writer Sophocles who lived almost 500 years before Christ, and outside of the covenant people Israel, wrote these words, confirming that there is a written code which men have in their hearts and that God is therefore just in judging these "secrets of men."

“Not now, nor yesterday, but evermore

These laws have lived: nor know we whence they came.”

We are being observed, evaluated, and our deeds – hidden and open – are being noted for the day of God’s judgment. And the final portion of that process will be “by Jesus Christ.” The Bible reveals with no uncertainty (such as in Act 17:31) that He is the One to whom all judgment has been granted –

“...because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.”

God has every right to judge His creatures, but how much more when He participated in His creation. And then, how much more when His creatures have rejected His participation! Jesus Christ, the God/Man will stand in judgment because He too stood in judgment. If His own creatures sentenced Him while innocent, how much more just is His judgment over their guilt? All of this is ensured to us as Paul says, “according to my gospel.”

Paul is not claiming authority to the gospel, as if he is its author. Instead, he is claiming authority to it as the herald of the Author’s message. His commission stands directly from the words of Jesus in Acts 9:15. There Jesus states, “...he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.” This then places Paul in opposition to any false gospel. His word is the authoritative word of God as transmitted through him, just as was the word of the prophets of old.

Life application: It is sobering to know that every thought we have and every thing we have done is known to God and that we are accountable to Him for these things. For this reason, we are told to bring “every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” Let each of us both strive for this individually and also remind others of this when the need arises.