

COMING UNDER GRACE

v. A Change of Heart

Romans 12:12-29

Paul levels the playing field in respect of God's evaluation of religious and non-religious people; in this instance Jew and Gentile. He introduces the concept of the law, whether in written form by way of the Torah, i.e. law of Moses for the Jew, or conscience for the Gentile. In itself the law has no ability to save. The gospel, to which the law points, is the means of salvation. Verses 12 to 16 argue that the law is an impartial standard of judgement, illustrating the principle "For God does not show favouritism" (vii).

What matters is not knowledge of the law, either by revelation or conscience, but obedience. Even people without instruction by way of the law, are responsible moral agents. Humanity has an innate moral sense of right and wrong. Gentiles are as bound to the voice of conscience as Jews are to the law.

There is no inconsistency in Paul's argument. There is no confusion about justification by faith as opposed to justification by keeping the law. He is simply laying the groundwork for the need for justification of the believer as an act of God's great grace. We obey God's law not by some innate ability of our own, but by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, about which Paul will elucidate later in his letter.

Only the Jews had God's law in its complete written form. However, all people have the law in its broader sense i.e. "the requirements of the law written on their hearts" (v15a). No one is capable of living by the law, whether the dictates of conscience or compliance to its letter. Hence the need for the gospel.

Richard Longenecker observes, 'There is probably no more ignored passage in the New Testament than Romans 2:17-29'. Little seems to be said about justification by faith, about the gospel or any of the distinctive teachings of Paul. Nevertheless, it forms an essential part of Paul's overall argument in his letter. In vv17-24 Paul seems to stop speaking directly to those who would receive his letter and begins to speak as if he were addressing an individual, a pretentious person whose moral inconsistency and basic falsehood he exposes and indicts. A series of 'if' questions forms the longest, most explicit and most intense of Paul's diatribes. He enumerates nine Jewish privileges. He is not being sarcastic. All the privileges he lists are legitimate having explicit Old

Testament warrant. The problem is inconsistency. They are not living up to their claims as God's people.

If the law is one of the Jewish distinctives then circumcision is the other. Paul addresses this in vv25-29. The issue is not physical circumcision as a religious boundary marker ensuring cultural compliance and fidelity, rather circumcision of the heart in a spiritual sense denoting devotion to God.

Paul emphasizes the need to actually do what God's law requires and not just know and approve it and judge others according to it whilst falling short oneself. Jews and Gentiles (Christians and non-Christians) alike have broken God's law. The only remedy is God's intervention through Christ and the gift of faith enabling us to trust and obey.

Alan Cameron
Trinity Presbyterian Church
Lynnwood
Sunday 26 February 2017