

Rom. 2:17-29 (LD 2) “A Natural Tendency”

For the Children: People have different characters. One person might tend to get angry easily, another is very calm and patient. One person laughs a lot, another is more serious. But one thing *everyone* has in their character: we all tend to sin. Unbelievers can do nothing that pleases God, because they don't know the Lord Jesus. But even God's children tend to sin, because we still have an old, sinful, nature that sticks to us like glue. The only way anyone can please God is by believing in the Son of God who perfectly pleased His Father. There is nothing to boast about in ourselves. We can only boast in Him. **Questions:** What does it mean to “boast” in the Lord Jesus? How does the Law of God help us to do that? Are God's children more deserving of God's love than unbelievers?

Introduction:

First Point: Why Pick on the Jews?

- 1) To Show That God Is Not Biased: God requires good fruit from everyone, whether Jew or Gentile. There is judgement awaiting all who do evil, whether Jew or Gentile. There is salvation for all who do good, whether Jew or Gentile. But all have sinned and come short of God's glory, both Jew and Gentile. Therefore, all need God's gift of grace in Christ, if they are to be saved. Note 2:9-12, 3:9-18, 20, 23. This removes any cause for boasting, except in Christ.
- 2) The Cream of the Crop: If anyone had reason to boast in themselves, it was the Jews. They had God's Word and covenants, and the Lord dwelling in their midst. They knew God and His will. They were chosen to be guides, correctors and teachers of the blind, a light to the Gentile nations (Is. 49:3). But if even they had no reason to boast, then no one else did!

Second Point: Why Emphasize the Law?

- 1) The Law Used to Show the Sin of the Jews: Despite all of the advantages mentioned above, the Jews broke God's Law – both Tables of it. The 8th commandment, 7th and 1st are used to show that they broke all of God's Law. For the Law is summed up by the fundamental principles: love God wholeheartedly, and your neighbour as yourself (Mt. 22:37-40, LD 2). They also failed to keep the ceremonial Law properly. Even with circumcision, one of things that distinguished them from the Gentiles, they failed to live up to its inward, spiritual meaning – the cutting away of sin from the heart.
- 2) The True Jew: The true Jew is the one who has a circumcised heart. A Gentile who keeps the requirements of the Law is regarded as spiritually circumcised. He will end up judging the Jews who were transgressors of the Law, while claiming to uphold the Law – though many Gentiles have also suppressed the truth in unrighteousness and will be judged accordingly
- 3) The Law as a Litmus Test: The apostle is not suggesting that Jews and Gentiles who keep the Law are earning their salvation. “Inward circumcision” is a work done “by the Spirit” (v. 29). It is grounded in Christ's saving work. The doing of the Law – however imperfectly – demonstrates a genuine union with Christ. That is why the Law can be used as a “litmus test” of inward circumcision.

Third Point: What Can We Infer from This?

- 1) The Tendency to Hate God and Neighbour: If even God's people, the Jews, failed to keep God's Law, who else could? Paul has proven that all men are “under sin.” This even applies to the believer: though we have a new nature created by the Holy Spirit, the old nature that hates God and neighbour remains. We are not under bondage to sin any more, but neither can we eradicate it in this life. Q/A 5 therefore uses this “natural tendency” language of the Christian!
- 2) In God's Favour: Nevertheless, because of the Spirit's work of joining us to the Lord Jesus, and because of His work on the cross (3:21f), we can live and die in God's favour – “Our praise comes from God” because of His work, not from our natural tendency.

Conclusion: