

THE BOOK OF ROMANS

Lesson 7, Chapter 2 continued

Put those thinking caps on today, it is going to be challenging. The things that often get glossed over in Romans we're going to attack with gusto! In Romans chapter 2 the role of the Law (or as the CJB prefers to say, the Torah) for both gentile and Jewish Believers takes a prominent place in the narrative. We'll take this slow and easy because the issue has immense implications for Judeo-Christianity. We're also going to spend some time examining common terms that we find within Christianity, but those terms are often not defined. This is where your study and knowledge of the Torah, and hopefully your study of the Book of Acts with us, will pay off handsomely.

The issue is made all the more complex because of the terminology that Paul employs; and unfortunately we have the added problem of Paul necessarily using Greek to transmit his Hebrew thoughts. And for 21st century English speakers yet another challenge is that we go through yet another layer of translation from Greek to English; Hebrew thought converted to Greek, and then the Greek converted to English. Step number one for Bible students is recognizing that there are challenges due to translation issues and they matter when we attempt to understand Holy Scripture. It is when we deny these issues that poor doctrine is created. Step number two is realizing that it doesn't take a PhD to understand the issues that we will explore and find an understandable solution. The Bible wasn't created by or for academics and theologians. It was created for average people to hear, read and understand. It is just that the distance of language, culture, and a couple thousand years of history puts us at a disadvantage, so we have to work a little harder to get to where God intends for us to go.

So while Jews of the first century could better understand by the context what Paul is getting at (even if they didn't necessarily agree with his conclusions or his theology), gentiles who don't understand Judaism are hopelessly lost in space unless they have been carefully familiarized with Jewish culture of the Biblical era and the role of **Halakhah** (Jewish law) versus the Bible. If we don't get this right, when we get there some weeks from now, it'll make the Romans chapter 7 discussion on the matter of the Law seem somewhere between maddening contradiction and a sort of first century religious/psycho-babble. Most denominations solve this problem by picking a few phrases of Paul's out of context, and then relying on them while ignoring his other phrases that seem to say exactly the opposite. We'll begin to tackle some of this today and I hope it is as interesting and eye-opening to you as it is to me. But you will need to focus.

One of the things to look for today is how Paul defines what "doing the Law" and "the work of the Law" actually is. Since Yeshua says in Matthew 5:17 that He didn't abolish the Law; and He says in Matthew 5:19 that to the measure one obeys the Law one's status in the Kingdom of God will be determined, then what "doing the Law" amounts to especially in modern times ought to be of supreme importance to every Believer.

Matthew 5:19 CJB ¹⁹ *So whoever disobeys the least of these mitzvot and teaches others to do so will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever obeys them and so teaches will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.*

So once you become a member of the Kingdom of Heaven you will be fitted somewhere within a hierarchy (as determined by God) from least to greatest fully dependent upon how zealously (or not) you obeyed the Law of Moses. However **becoming** a member of the Kingdom of the Heaven is, ironically, NOT dependent on obeying the Law, it is entirely a matter of trusting God and having faith in Yeshua as our Messiah and Lord. And no doubt Paul's definition of "doing the Law" comes as something of a surprise especially to his Jewish hearers of his day. So open your Bibles to the Book of Romans as we continue with this important letter that has become the fulcrum upon which modern Christianity balances. Whether it ought to or not is a matter of opinion.

RE-READ ROMANS CHAPTER 2:12 - end

We just heard verse 12 in the CJB but now I'd like to read it to you in the King James Version.

^{KJV} **Romans 2:12** *For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law;*

Notice how the CBJ chooses to use the word Torah where the KJV and virtually all other English versions use the term law. Whether your Bible reads "without law" or "outside the framework of the Torah" both of these phrases are actually attempted translations of the Greek word **anomos**. **Nomos** means law, or a custom that is regularly obeyed; **anomos** means "not law" or "without law" or "in ignorance of the law". **Nomos** and **anomos** are common words in Greek that apply to any law in most any context in general. Therefore for Roman gentiles it was up to the context of the conversation to flesh out how the term was meant. To the Jews, however, the term law had a smaller range of meanings but in every case it pointed towards their religious laws that are seen as having come (one way or another) from the God of Israel. Even more, how we moderns take the term "law" in English has a number of variables. In the Bible, however, we should take nearly every instance of the word "law" as being a religious term. In non-religious usage, in the gentile world, the term law is used differently. For instance: quite often the police or the sheriff is called "the law". Or we say that someone is "breaking the law", and we mean that there is some societal statute, civil or criminal, that a perpetrator is violating and so we think of it in a legal sense. Or we can speak of "the law" as an entire system of rules enforced through various governmental institutions. Thus it is important that we remember that in the Book of Romans the Hebrew Paul is thinking in Hebrew cultural and religious terms, and not in Roman gentile cultural terms. So especially when he speaks of someone **sinning** without the Law, clearly this helps us understand that Paul means "Law" in the Hebrew religious sense of it. Therefore "without law" should be better translated "without THE Law" because Paul is speaking of the system of rules that govern all Jewish behavior within Jewish culture; and in his letters Paul usually calls this "The Law".

However as Paul uses the term "the Law", and often within Hebrew culture as well, "the Law" is not a precise or technical term; it is general. In much earlier OT times "the Law" strictly

meant the Law of Moses (the Torah) as received at Mt. Sinai. But in Paul's day, when the synagogue and **not** the Temple was the most influential and prevalent religious institution of the Jews, the term "the Law" had taken on a more broad meaning and in general it more meant Jewish Law, **Halakhah**, which was a blend of manmade traditions, plus interpretations of the Law of Moses, plus what is often called oral law. Oral law is a little different from Tradition in that it is said among academic Jews that what is written down in the Law of Moses is NOT all that Moses received on Mt. Sinai. There were other laws (called Oral Laws) that God also gave Moses but for various reasons Moses chose NOT to write them down; rather they were handed down word of mouth (orally). Yet they remained valuable and valid and (for Jews) equal in inspiration and authority as the written Torah. So for a Jew the term "the Law" pointed towards a large body of rulings that they lived by that theoretically had its common foundation based upon what God gave to Moses on Mt. Sinai. And this is because **Halakhah** purports to be the proper interpretation of what God gave to Moses on Mt. Sinai, no matter how fanciful the interpretation might be.

While that might have your head spinning, in effect it is almost exactly how Christianity works today, and has for centuries. For instance; Christians often speak of the Trinity and when asked about it say that it is in the Bible. I have news for you; it is not. The word Trinity never appears in the Bible, OT or NT. Rather the word Trinity is actually the name given to a manmade Roman Church doctrine that seems to have come about in the 3rd century A.D. This Church doctrine of the Trinity arose mainly from an interpretation by some early Church authorities concerning this passage in Matthew 28:19: ^{CJB} **Matthew 28:19 Therefore, go and make people from all nations into talmidim, immersing them into the reality of the Father, the Son and the Ruach HaKodesh,**

As you might imagine there is NO single, universally accepted Doctrine of the Trinity within Christianity since indeed it is a manmade doctrine and is not a direct passage from Holy Scripture. Nearly every denomination has its own version of it and some denominations don't believe in the three-Gods-in-one theology at all. But the point is that those who do say that it is valid also say that it's in the Bible. In reality, however, the Doctrine of the Trinity is only an interpretation of a Biblical passage made by certain Church authorities; but in common Christian speech and thinking, Holy Scripture and the Doctrine of the Trinity are essentially the same things, carrying the same weight of authority. That's how it worked in Judaism when the term "the Law" was used. Some of what was said to comprise "the Law" was indeed taken word for word directly from Holy Scripture (the Law of Moses, the Torah), but most of the time by Paul's day what was ordained and followed by Jewish society was what manmade Tradition (**Halakhah**) said that the Law of Moses meant or led to.

In any case the point is that often in the NT era, like here in Romans 2:12, the term "the Law" had a rather broad, general sense to it that didn't intend to make any scholarly or technical differentiation between the Law of Moses and the various manmade Jewish traditions that had developed especially since the Babylonian exile; it was all considered as equally valid and of the same substance and, most importantly, of the same level of divine authority. Again; it works very similarly in the Christian Church as regards doctrines and Scripture.

As used here in Romans chapter 2 what we must try to grasp is that "the Law" was more than

a set of religious rulings for Jews to follow; it described and instilled an entire way of life. The Law is what defined Jewish identity. Following “the Law” was what separated Jews from gentiles. So to a Jew a person who lived “without the law” indicated a non-Jew....a gentile. There was no such thing as a Jew who lived “without the law”, or that person wouldn’t still be considered as a Jew.

And interestingly Paul says that a person who was raised without the Law (a gentile) was as liable to offend God and perish as the Jewish person who was raised in a society that revolved around the Law (the Law in its broad sense, more than only the Law of Moses) but nonetheless this Jew could offend God by **not** obeying the Law. So what Paul is plainly saying is that simply being a Jew doesn’t immunize you from God’s wrath. In Christian-ese: simply being a Jew doesn’t save you. And especially so if you break the Law that is the main thing that you cling to as what separates you, even elevates you, from gentiles.

Then in verse 13 Paul says something that would have really bothered Jews of his day. He says that being one who hears the Law doesn’t make the hearer (a Jewish hearer) righteous before God. Rather it is those Jews who DO the Law who are righteous. Here are a couple of things to notice. Notice how it is not that those who “read” the Law, but rather those who “hear”. Where did one “hear” the Law in Paul’s day? In the synagogue. Traditions were taught orally, as they had not yet been written down. And Holy Scripture, since it had long ago been translated into Greek, was more accessible to the average Diaspora Jew than it ever had been. But still most Jews did not possess a Bible. So indeed, nearly universally Jews were “hearers” of the Law (Traditions and Scripture), but they heard it in the synagogue from the mouths of Pharisees and not at the Temple. The other thing is that in Paul’s day the Jewish societal belief was that being Jewish automatically made you righteous before God. Any kind of salvation experience for a Jew had to do with being physically saved from a bad circumstance (for instance, from being occupied and oppressed by Rome). The kind of salvation that Christianity envisions, and that Paul preaches, is meant in the spiritual sense (that is, we are saved in the sense of our souls being given eternal life by the Lord). This is the reason that Paul is explaining to these Jews of the city of Rome that merely being Jewish doesn’t keep them safe from God’s wrath. And this thought would have severely agitated most of the Jewish community including some of the Jewish Believers.

So, says Paul, it is the doers of the Law who are judged righteous by God. And, surprisingly, this applies to the group that does NOT have the Law (gentiles) as well as the group that DOES have the Law (Jews). ^{KJV} **Romans 2:14** *For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves:*

Needless to say verses 13 and 14 seem very difficult to understand and would have upset the Jewish community to no end. But now here is something that causes great consternation within the Christian community. It is best seen in the KJV. In verse 13 we read: ^{KJV} **Romans 2:13** *For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.*

Did you hear that? Doers of the Law shall be justified. Let’s pause to define a term. In

Christian parlance, the word “justified” means to be made righteous before God through faith in Christ. Modern Christianity, dating back to Luther, emphasizes that since justification is through faith alone, then it is impossible that works (physically doing something) can be involved. So how does that operate here when clearly Paul says that it is the “doers of the Law (who) shall be justified”? Folks, this is one big sticky wicket because if we stop right here and go no further, understand that Paul just literally said that if one does the Law then that will be their justification before God. So does Paul mean that one can either be justified by doing the Law, or justified by faith in Christ? That indeed there is an option A and option B for salvation? Or, as some have decided, Jews are justified by doing the Law but gentiles are justified by faith in Christ? So indeed Christ is NOT for the Jews but only for gentiles?

Part of the problem with this verse comes with the translation from the Greek to the English and a determination by Christian commentators to insert the word “justification” where I don’t think it necessarily belongs. Essentially they try to make two English words “righteous” and “justification” that both come from the SAME Greek word mean two different things in order to wind up with a theological result that they have predetermined. Let me help you through this very real dilemma. The reality is that the Greek words used in verse 13 for when this verse says that merely hearers of the Law will NOT be **just** before God, but only the doers of the law shall be **justified**, are the exact same root word in slightly different forms and both times they are used in our passage they actually mean righteous (not justified). Recall from an earlier lesson in Romans that the standard root word for righteous in Greek is **dikaioo** and when it is used here in verse 13 **dikaioo** is applied to both to the hearer of the Law NOT being deemed by God as **just** and to those who are **justified** by DOING the Law. That is, English translators customarily choose to use the words just and justified instead of using the more standard and correct word righteous. This is the result of lots of literary gymnastics by Bible commentators to try and figure out how to wiggle out of the problem that on the one hand Christians proclaim that we can only be justified by faith in Jesus, but on the other hand we have Paul saying bluntly and clearly that the **doers of the Law** shall be justified. And we find this is in all English versions so it is not an error.

EP Sanders dealt with this conundrum in a wonderfully creative way. He says that we first need to replace the word “justified” (a uniquely Christian term when used within the Church that means to be made righteous on account of Christ), with the word righteoused. I know that sounds strange; Sanders is adding an e-d to the end of the noun righteous to make it into the verb righteoused (a word that doesn’t actually exist in the English vocabulary). But since the Greek words used in verse 13 are but variations of **dikaioo**, which clearly means righteous, then it is much more helpful and appropriate to our understanding to use our newly minted English word righteoused than sticking the word justified in here just because we want to give it a distinctively Christian connotation. The beauty of using the word righteoused is that it doesn’t carry a particularly Christian or a particularly Jewish context with it. By using righteoused then we understand the true meaning of what Paul is communicating, which is to say that a person is made truly righteous ONLY by God Himself taking a divine action upon that person to bring it about. God reached down from Heaven and righteoused that person. That is, God, through His own unique power and sovereign decision, changed a person who was not righteous into a person who now is righteous in His sight. He righteoused him.

But now we have the other dilemma to deal with. Is it true, then, that one can either do the Law in order to be made righteous OR one can have faith in the Jewish Messiah to be made righteous? The means to untangle this is to understand what the phrase “doing the Law” means according to Paul.

Paul said in verses 9 and 10: **Romans 2:9-11 CJB** ⁹ *Yes, he will pay back misery and anguish to every human being who does evil, to the Jew first, then to the Gentile;* ¹⁰ *but glory and honor and shalom to everyone who keeps doing what is good, to the Jew first, then to the Gentile.* ¹¹ *For God does not show favoritism.*

So the reward for those who do evil is misery, and the reward for doing good is glory, honor, and shalom. Thus we find that the results for those who “do what is good” are the same as for “the doers of the Law”. And this is why Paul is able to say that gentiles who do what is good, but don’t have the Law, are the same as Jews who have the Law and they **do** the Law. Both gentiles and Jews are essentially doing the Law because to Paul “doing the Law” is a faith-oriented obedience to God.

What does this mean for us? Please focus all your attention on this, because if you can apprehend this it will answer many questions for you. It means that Paul is saying that it is the Law (the Law of Moses, the Torah) that in its entirety embodies the standard that **MUST** be met if a person hopes to be made righteous by God (or in Christian terminology, if a person hopes to be justified by God). But by this I do **NOT** mean that the Law itself is what makes us righteous. Rather I mean that Paul’s purpose is **NOT** to show **how** a person can be justified by God (be righteous) but rather what the standard for justification is. And the standard is set forth in the Law by showing us what is good and right in God’s eyes, and what is not.

Let me give you an example of what I mean. It’s the Olympic trials and you are a star pole vaulter. But the rules say that it isn’t simply an issue of whoever vaults the highest at the trials gets a trip to the Olympics. Rather it is that a particular height has been set by the Olympic Committee as a standard and it must be met or exceeded if a pole vaulter is going to qualify for the Olympics. If the height standard is 17 feet, and best pole vaulter present at the trials only vaults 16’11”, then nobody gets to go because nobody met the standard. But even more, the Olympic committee doesn’t tell you **HOW** to get yourself to that standard. All they’ve done is to set the standard height that must be met, along with certain rules as boundaries for however you intend to get there. And Paul says that the Law lays out the standard for being right with God. How are you able to meet that standard? That’s a different issue. But, whether Jew or gentile, whether you have the Law of Moses as your moral guide or you have the natural law that all human beings have as your only moral guide, the standard for being righteous is the same.

But if the Law is the standard, how can people who don’t have the Law (gentiles) even know what the standard is? Paul answers that question in verse 15 (we’ll go back to the CJB). **Romans 2:15 CJB** ¹⁵ *For their lives show that the conduct the Torah dictates is written in their hearts. Their consciences also bear witness to this, for their conflicting thoughts sometimes accuse them and sometimes defend them*

While the CJB captures the overall meaning of this verse very well, I also want you to hear this same verse in a different English version, the ESV, because it is a little more literal to the Greek. ^{ESV} **Romans 2:15 *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***

A couple of things to see here. First, Paul says that the lives of those gentiles who naturally don't have the Law of Moses as their guide, nonetheless demonstrate that the WORK of the Law is written on their hearts. Since to a Christian a work is a physical action, how can a physical action be written on our heart? Note that Paul is not speaking of the natural law in this case; rather he is still speaking about the Law of Moses. And the point he is making is that there are gentile Believers who have no knowledge of the Law of Moses and yet, ironically, they naturally do the requirements of the Law. They have deep within them a natural moral sensitivity that reflects God's will and standards that one would sooner expect to find in Jews who have the Law of Moses as their guide.

But second, to put a finer point on it, this verse doesn't say that "the law is written on their hearts"; it says that the "work" of the law is written on their hearts. Here is another verse that gives Christian Bible commentators fits because of this allergic reaction to anything that a Believer might do that even closely resembles "a work". And this is especially so when Paul says plainly, "the work of the Law is written on their hearts". Here's the thing; once again it is the English translation from the Greek, and not understanding Hebrew thought, that gets in our way and can give us a mistaken understanding.

In this verse the English word "work" (work of the Law) is what is usually used to translate the Greek word **ergon**. And while "work" isn't necessarily incorrect, without fail we take the word "work" to mean something like "labors" or "deeds". It has to do with our exertion or effort. But **ergon** has a little different sense to it in this context. It more leans towards meaning the business of something; what a certain thing is supposed to accomplish. We might say that the work of the United States Constitution is to bring equal justice for all. Or, for instance, there is an old management saying that the business of business is business. In other words, a business shouldn't get bogged down in other things or get distracted by other matters that in the end don't contribute to what the purpose of their business actually is. So in the 21st century way that English is spoken, rather than use the word "work" that makes us think that this is talking about deeds, a better translation would be: ***"They show that the business of the Law is written on their hearts..."*** In other words, Paul says that what the Law was created to accomplish.....the business of the Law....what the Law is truly all about....is written on these gentile's hearts even though they don't have the physical, written Law of Moses to guide them. The purpose and the standard of the Law is what is revealed to the hearts of these gentiles, even though the details of the Law are not.

I've used the term heart many times now but I want to remind you that I'm only using it the way the Bible literally uses it. But while in modern times we speak of the heart metaphorically as the seat of our emotions that is not what the Bible means. The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery says this about the use of the word heart in the Bible: ***"We associate thought and memory with the brain today; but in the idiom of the Bible, thinking is a function of the heart"***. So

heart in the Bible refers to our thoughts, not how we feel. The better word for our modern vocabulary instead of heart is mind. Every time we see the word heart in the Bible, we need to insert the word mind, according to what the words heart and mind means in English today versus what the word heart meant in ancient times. Biblically the heart is not about acting emotionally; it is not about feelings. Biblically, heart is about thinking, remembering, calculating and making decisions and moral judgments. So what is NOT being talked about is some kind of ethereal activity or unexplained emotional impulse that a gentile can't trace as to why he makes the moral choices that he does. Rather it is that Paul says that the standard of the Law has been written into the thinking and rational part of a human being, his mind, and that is why he is making the good moral choices that he is. And it is God who put it there.

Let me pause to make this point: Paul is saying all this in order to lead up to something. Paul is simply laying out the foundation of his case in an orderly way. And what he is doing is putting Jews and gentiles on equal footing, and explaining that Jews are not so privileged that their Jewish heritage somehow exempts them from God's wrath on judgment day. But neither are gentiles automatically evil (simply because they aren't Jews), and that because they don't know anything about the Law of Moses doesn't mean they are automatically condemned to God's wrath at judgment day. And finally, after making all these points, he declares that what he is saying is in accordance with the Gospel of Christ.

For the final time in this lesson, I'll remind you that this entire letter he is writing (the Book of Romans) is addressed to Believers and not all Romans or all humans in general! He is talking to Believers about Believing gentiles and Jews, but addresses each group within their own social context (the natural law and doing good for gentiles, the Law of Moses and obeying the Law for Jews). But then he ends up by saying that both amount to the same thing. And it is that "doing the Law" is in reality obedience to God, based on faith and trust. And that "doing the Law" in that sense is thus a necessity for both gentiles and Jews to avoid God's wrath at the judgment.

Beginning in verse 17 he continues his diatribe and takes aim at the thing that Jews value so greatly. In fact the word itself that Paul takes aim at, circumcision, is a term that Jews in his era actually called themselves: the circumcised. Thus Jews would call themselves the circumcised, and so called gentiles the un-circumcised. So as confounding as the next few verses might sound to gentiles and English speakers, Paul was doing no more than using the common Jewish vernacular of his day.

And, we'll finish off Romans chapter 2 and get a start on Romans chapter 3 next time.