

• *Everyone needs a Saviour*

Why is the gospel needed? Because of the wrath of God^{☐1}. God's wrath is upon vile sin^{☐2} and upon the respectable sin^{☐3}. Everyone needs a Saviour, the 'good' as well as the 'scandalous sinner'.

☐1 1:18

☐2 1:18-32

☐3 2:1-11

• *The Law – a system of written instructions given to Moses for Israel*

At Romans 2:12 Paul comes to specially consider the place of the law of God given to Israel through Moses. He says: ¹²*For everyone who has sinned without the law will also perish without the law; and everyone who has sinned although he or she has the law, will be judged by the law.* The 'law' means the whole written system of instructions given to Moses on Mount Sinai at the beginning of Israel's history as a nation. The ten commandments are only a small part of the law. And the word 'law' does not refer to some kind of natural law or unwritten law.

1. Sin exists without the law

1. Sin may exist when the Mosaic law is not known, 'All who have sinned without the law . . .'. It is often said that 'sin is the transgression of the law' – a phrase taken from 1 John 3:4 – but that way of translating it is not accurate. Actually there may be sin where there is no written law. If Philip had disobeyed the instruction given to him in Acts 8:29, would he not have been guilty of sin? But he would not have been breaking any law. 'Sin' is any departure from what God wants.

2. Guilt exists without the law

2. The absence of the law does not prevent the guilt of the unsaved person.

3. Gentiles are 'without the law'

3. The Mosaic law never was given to gentiles. They are 'without the law'. This is also his point in 1 Corinthians 9:20–21 and Ephesians 2:11–22.

4. Jews are judged by the law – Gentiles without it

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. Gentiles will be judged without it. Jews will be judged by it. Unsaved Jews will be condemned for breaches of the Mosaic law. Paul uses 'perish' when referring to gentiles but 'judged' when referring to Jews. Both perish – if unsaved – but Jews go through an additional matter, that of being scrutinized in terms of the Mosaic law. God demands more of the Jew.

• *God demands more of the person who has been instructed*

The important principle is that God demands more of the person who has been instructed. The Jew knew the law. Perhaps you know the Bible, the witness of Christians, the teaching of a church or of Christian parents. This will not save you in itself. Knowledge will only become useful if you have Jesus as a Saviour first. If you don't have Jesus as a Saviour no religious privileges will protect. ¹³*For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God. On the contrary it is the doers of the law who will be vindicated.* Jewish people heard the law very frequently in the synagogues but this did not mean that they were in any way righteous before God by their hearing the law. 'The doers of the law shall be vindicated.' (i) He is not saying that the unconverted person can be saved by works. This would contradict Romans 3:19–20, 1 Corinthians 2:14 and much of the teaching of Scripture elsewhere. Paul certainly does not teach that the 'good pagan' will be saved. Far from it! (ii) Paul does not give any hint that he is speaking hypothetically. He does not say, 'If anyone could keep the law he would be . . .'. He says: 'The doers of the law shall be . . .'

• *Main point – Jews in fact do not keep the law*

His main point is that Jews in fact do not keep the law, but there are people – Christians – who do fulfil the law. They will be vindicated at judgement day. Paul has something in mind which he will fully state in Romans 8:4; 13:8–10. Christians will be vindicated and rewarded in judgement day. Paul has Christians in mind but he is not saying yet how we get to be godly people, and how we get to fulfil the law. His aim is to show that Jews must not think that their possessing the law saves them. Judgement is according to works. He does not spell out in detail who these

• *Jews must not think that their possessing the law*

saves them

'godly' people are. He is showing that everyone needs a Saviour. But the later message of the letter will show that Christians will be vindicated for keeping the law by walking in the Spirit.

It is a mistake to think that verse 13 means that unconverted people may 'by nature' keep the (unwritten!) law. He has just said gentiles do not have the law at all! Paul never speaks of unwritten, 'natural' law. No doubt we do have a sense of morality in our nature, but Paul does not use the word 'law' in this connection. 'Law' refers to the written Mosaic code. And pagans do not follow the light of nature; they resist it. Notice the punctuation of my translation. It is not speaking of times when 'gentiles who do not have the law, by nature do things that the law requires . . .'. Rather it is times when 'gentiles who do not have the law by birth, do things that the law requires . . .'. The phrase 'by nature' or 'by birth' joins on to what precedes, not to what follows. It is identical to the phrase 'by birth' in Ephesians 2:3 and Galatians 2:15. So I translate: ¹⁴*For when gentiles who do not have the law by birth, do things that the law requires, then those people, who do not have the law, are the law in themselves.*

When a gentile does fulfil the law without having the law there is some kind of law within himself. He does fulfil the law (by walking in the Spirit). Paul is using the language of Jeremiah 31:31-34.

5. Christian gentiles can fulfil the Mosaic law without being under it!

- The aim of the commandment was to bring about love
- Christian gentiles are not under the law, but have something which leads them into fulfilling everything the law was pointing to

5. Christian gentiles fulfil the Mosaic law without being under it! ¹⁵*They show that the work of the law is written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their reasonings accusing or even excusing one another.* What the law is aiming at is written in Christian hearts. The aim of the commandment was to bring about love. The desire to love is written on the heart of the Christian. God works in our hearts and produces sensitivity. It is not all the details of the law that are produced ('the works – plural – of the law') but the intended goal of the law ('work' – singular). The Christians have an enlightened conscience. Their consciences bear witness with what they are doing. The Christian has discernment. He is able to see God's will and reflect upon his own life in the light of what he knows to be God's will. One can be under the law but not have a clear mind. The Christian gentiles are the opposite of this. They are not under the law, but have something which leads them into fulfilling everything the law was pointing to. They will be vindicated in the last day because they fulfilled the law, even though they were not concentrating attention on the law. The Jew will perish if he does not have the protecting salvation of Jesus. The Mosaic law saves no one!



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