



Introduction

In vv. 17, 18 there are five second person *singular* verb forms, which are then followed by a single participial phrase at the end of v.18.

Verses 19 and 20 expand Paul's teaching by adding five more descriptive phrases that detail of what "you have persuaded yourself." And then, v.20, also ends with another participial phrase about the Law.



Introduction

Verses 21 and 22 continue with four rhetorical questions, followed by a challenging statement about the Law (v.23).

Paul ends this section listing the dangers of relying on the Law with a climatic and scathing indictment from the OT (v.24).



Introduction

The structure of this section of Chapter 2 is very impressive! Paul's syntactic and rhetorical characteristics are very noteworthy.

Lastly, Paul uses the term $vo\mu\phi$ (Law) in several different ways, but most often as the Mosaic Law that makes ethical demands.

But if you are calling yourself a Jew and you rely upon the Law and you boast in God and you know the will[of God] and you are discerning the differing things by being instructed by the Law, [if] you have persuaded yourself and remain convinced that you are a guide of blind ones, a light of the ones in darkness, an instructor of unlearned ones, a teacher of immature ones, having the embodiment of the knowledge and of the truth in the Law, therefore the one who teaches another, are you not teaching yourself? The one who proclaims that [another] should not steal, are you stealing? The one who says that [another] should not commit adultery, are you committing adultery? The one who abhors idols, are you robbing temples? You who are boasting in the Law, through the transgression of the Law you are dishonoring God. For, just as it stands written, "Because of you the name of God is being blasphemed among the Gentiles."

"You Are Calling Yourself a Jew" (17a)

This is an interesting way for Paul to begin his critique of the "Jew!" "Israelite" was the dominate OT title for God's chosen people and pagan writers never used this term. But during the intertestamental period, Jew(ish) (Ιουδαίος) became the common title for and also the "selfdesignation" of an Israelite. Paul is using the term Jew(ish) to specifically contrast the Jew(ish) converts to **Christianity from their Gentile** neighbors.

"You Are Calling Yourself a Jew" (17a)

And Paul is using this term to point out to them that a Jew is relying on/pursuing righteousness by doing works of the Law (vv. 17, 23; 9:32; 10:5). He is also using this term in addressing the Jew to all the other qualifiers in the rest of this section, which we will discuss next!

But if you are calling yourself a Jew and you rely upon the Law and you boast in God and you know the will[of God] and you are discerning the differing things by being instructed by the Law, [if] you have persuaded yourself and remain convinced that you are a guide of blind ones, a light of the ones in darkness, an instructor of unlearned ones, a teacher of immature ones, having the embodiment of the knowledge and of the truth in the Law,

It's important for us to know that Paul is explicitly talking to the Jew and not to Gentiles. And even his address to the Jew is limited (he not talking about ALL Jews). Paul does this by the use of "qualifiers;" "if" clauses beginning here and ending in v.20 (they are highlighted in blue above).

What's the Issue?

The problem being discussed by Paul is the same that our Lord Jesus identified in certain Jewish leaders of His day.

Let's review Matthew 23:2-3; and then let's read once again verses 21-23.

Romans 2:17b, c

"You Rely upon the Law" (17b) and "You Boast in God" (17c)

The second clause (17b) defines the "you" whom Paul is addressing. "You" rely upon the Law. This is a statement that "limits" the addressee, since it can't be a Gentile. And lastly, in 17c, is another statement that describes the Jew in whom Paul is addressing. This statement in and of itself isn't negative, since it could well be a positive. Yet, the issue is the problematic middle clause (17b) and this leads the Jew to a different ground for boasting!

Romans 2:17b, c



No doubt the Law is a gift from God to Israel. Yet, the Law itself, apart from faith in God's salvation, was never intended to be the defining basis for Israel's identity. Their identity was to be found only in YHWH (cf. Ex. 20:2; Dt. 5:6). These verses clearly tell Israel that they were to rely upon YHWH (not the Law) for their salvation.

Romans 2:18-20

"You Know the Will [of God]...Having...the Law" (18-20)

Verse 18 is positive. The root word for instructed (and revelation) in Hebrew is a word we know well Torah (ブラブラ). Israel had received God Law as a revelation of God's will and as that which gave the people instruction for discerning good from evil and living the blessed life (cf. Dt. 30:11-20). This is the positive role of "being instructed from the Law."

Romans 2:18-20

"You Know the Will [of God]...Having...the Law" (18-20)

So this brings us to v.19 and Paul immediately raises a "red flag!" You, a Jew, has persuaded yourself and You remain convinced that You are able to complete the four descriptions: of being a guide, a light, instructors of unlearned ones; and teachers of immature ones.

The issue is that Paul is taking them back to their Messiah (Jesus) and His interactions with the Pharisees (cf. Mt. 15:14; 23:16, 24); and the OT (Pss. 27:1; 119:105).

Romans 2:18-20

"You Know the Will [of God]...Having...the Law" (18-20)

Paul then closes with the first participial phrase that he has already used in 1:18, 19. The Law is the "embodiment of the Knowledge and the Truth."

The Greek article that Paul uses (την) signifies the "par excellence" of the Law: THE Knowledge and THE Truth!

Romans 2:21, 22

Do You Practice what You Preach? (21, 22)

Paul now turns and confronts "You" with four rhetorical questions. The first question is used to draw the hearer in; the second and third refer to specific commandments; and the last question seems not only shocking, but rather out of place.

Romans 2:21, 22

Do You Practice what You Preach? (21, 22)

The first three are clear...so let's address the last question. It's an odd question to ask of a Jew! We recall that idolatry was an issue in Israel's past; yet, by the 1st century, Jews generally detested any kind of iconic idolatry.

Romans 2:21, 22

Do You Practice what You Preach? (21, 22)

So what specifically is Paul talking about? He may be pointing out how they are robbing from God by not paying the temple tax or withholding gifts (offerings) from God.

Josephus (Antiquities, 18, ch. iii, ¶5) also addresses this and even gives examples of Jews not giving in support of the Church.

Romans 2:23, 24

"Are You Dishonoring God" (23, 24)

Paul is addressing the Jew who is among God's people, who are instructed by the embodied knowledge and truth of God's revealed Law and who have persuaded themselves to be guides and teachers. They have, in reality and fact, disobeyed God holy Law in which they boast. As a result, God is being dishonored and His holy name is being blasphemed. How so? When those who boast in the Law, openly transgress the Law; and then, by their conduct, which even the pagan world knows is evil, dishonors God.

Romans 2:23, 24

"Are You Dishonoring God" (23, 24)

Paul's reinforcement is the OT, specifically, Is. 52:5. It's also possible that Mal. 1:11-12 and Ezek. 36:20 may also be in view!

"Because of you the name of God is being blasphemed among the Gentiles." In the context of which Paul is using Is. 52:5, transgression of the Law validates his accusation. It's also ironic that the "YOU" isn't singular, but plural! Paul now levels his accusation, collectively.

Romans 2:25-29

Defining Circumcision (vv. 25-29)

²⁵Indeed, circumcision is a benefit if you keep on practicing the Law. But if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become and remains uncircumcision. ²⁶If then the uncircumcised [person] keeps the righteous requirements of the Law, his uncircumcision will be credited as circumcision, will it not? ²⁷ And the one who by nature is uncircumcised and carries out the Law will judge you, the one with the written letter and circumcision who is a transgressor of the Law. ²⁸For the Jew is not in what is visible, neither is circumcision in what is visible in the flesh. 29But the Jew is in what is hidden, and circumcision is of [the] heart, in Spirit not in written letter, whose praise is not from people but from God.

Romans 2:25-29

In addition to possession of the Law, Jews also took pride in circumcision as an indicator of their righteous status before God. Paul debunks such an understanding in vv.25-29. He emphasizes that physical circumcision, in and of itself, does a Jew no good if one does not keep the Law, perfectly; or has faith in the promise.

Circumcision was given as a witness to the promise of the Messiah (Heb. 9:22); yet, it took on a life of its own apart from the promise in some Jewish groups by the first century (cf. Galatians) Romans 2:25-29

Paul emphasizes the "circumcision of the heart" as more important than the outward, physical sign (v.29). Paul had dealt with this problem extensively with the Galatians (cf. Gal. 5:2-6).

We may also refer to Col. 2:9-15 for some excellent Scripture pertaining to infant baptism and circumcision of the heart, which parallels with the Jewish eighth day circumcision.

Romans 2:25-29

So then, Who is a Jew?

The proper answer is realizing that one's identity as a Jew is, literally, "...in the hidden" (Ev τῷ κρυπτῶ) place (v.29). It entails a circumcision which "...is of the heart, in Spirit..." (v.28) and receives "praise," therefore, "from God" (v.29) (cf. Mt. 6:6, 18)!



In closing, the human tendency to reduce faith to externals, to a matter of outward expression and conduct which seeks praises from people, is a perennial problem! Therefore, we could rephrase Paul's text to the Jew and replace "Jew" with "Christian:"



If you bear the name "Christian" and rely upon your own works and even boast in what a good person you are before God, I want to ask you, "Do you really do all that God requires?" (v.17). True, "Baptism now saves you" (1 Peter 3:21) through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:1-4), but your Baptism is of value only if the faith given you in your Baptism is alive and so generates a desire to do God's will (v.25). If not, even unbelievers who do carry out the good which God requires will turn to condemn you (v.27). So who is a real Christian?



One who has been baptized merely on the outside and makes an outward show of going to church and doing good? No, a true Christian is one who has the Spirit and faith in Christ on the inside, where no one but God can see. Such a person does not do good to receive praise from people, but in humble response to the gracious God, who will then offer His word of praise on the Last Day: "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Mt. 25:21, 23; cf. Rom 2:28-29).1

¹Middendorf, Michael P. *Romans, 1-8*. Concordia Commentary. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2013, p. 214-215.

Amen!



ROMANS 3:1-8

CHALLENGING
QUESTIONS...
DIVINE
ANSWERS!