

Romans 2:12-13

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If someone depends on the law, they will be judged by the law. So, disobedience of the law (sin, which we all do) will bring us condemnation under the law.

The word "law" appears fifty times in Romans, but this is its first occurrence. To this point, Paul has asserted to his audience of Gentile Roman believers, whose faith is being proclaimed throughout the entire world (1:8), that a just or righteous life comes through living a resurrected life by daily faith (Romans 1:16-17). Believers receive power for effective living through the gospel. Believers gain the experience and reward of living His life in resurrection power through a daily walk of faith. The contrast to living by faith is to live an unjust or unrighteous life. Unrighteous/sinful living leads to a consequence of wrath (Romans 1:24, 26, 28). It brings adverse consequences both in this life as well as at the Judgment of Christ, in the next life.

In Romans 2:1, Paul began to address anyone who judges others for the same or similar things they themselves do, and is still speaking to any such person when he here introduces the word "law" for the first time:

For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law (v 12).

For any person to judge another, it requires a set of rules or laws—a standard. Paul will develop from this point a stark contrast between a life lived under law and a life lived by faith. Paul will culminate this contrast in 9:30–10:13 where he contrasts the "righteousness of faith" versus the "righteousness of the law" and asserts that seeking righteousness or justice via the law does not result in righteousness, while living by faith produces righteousness (or just living).

For it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified (v 13). Paul asserts here that anyone who fully complies with the law will be justified before God. Of course no one other than Jesus, who is God, can accomplish such a feat. As Paul will soon claim, all have sinned (Romans 3:23).

The main point from the culminating passage of Romans 9:30–10:13 is found in Romans 10:5–10, which quotes Deuteronomy. This is summed up in Deuteronomy 30:14 that we all know in our heart what is right, so we ought to believe what God teaches us is for our best and we ought to do it. That is what brings just living, or experienced righteousness. Sadly, however, human nature is to be self-seeking as well as self-justifying, and the primary means to self-justify is via laws or rules.

The primary way we condemn others is by a standard, a law, pronouncing people unjust because they violate the standard. But Paul will make clear that there is no human standard by which we can actually be justified, for in whatever way we condemn others we condemn ourselves (Romans 2:1). We have a common problem that spans humanity, for although we might express them differently we all do the same things.

Paul is setting up a defense for the slandering of his message of good news (Romans 3:8). This slander is expressed by certain Jewish authorities whose opposition to Paul has been raised in Rome (Romans 2:17). These competing “authorities” have set themselves up as judges, and are using condemnation to gain authority over others (a common human trait at all levels and at all times).

Paul is asserting in this section that there is only one true authority who will judge deeds, and that is Jesus Christ. Paul will emphasize that God accepts us as His children solely because He chooses to. His acceptance is without condition, and is received by faith (John 3:14-16; Romans 4:3-5). He then judges His children’s deeds to reward behavior on earth. God grants approval based on what we have done. Acceptance is granted unconditionally, approval depends upon our choices. In each case, it is God who decides, not man.

Jesus tells us in Matthew 7:2 that whatever standard we measure others against, God will use that standard to measure us. So if we apply the law, or any set of rules to others, those rules will, in turn, be applied to us by God. Even without laws or rules we are still accountable, because God has placed the knowledge of right and wrong in the heart of every man; humans have witnessed that knowledge by His presence in all of nature (Romans 1:19–20).

The Apostle Paul asserts that every person knows right and wrong; it is implanted in their hearts. In order to be just in the sight of God via the *law* requires actual performance of the *law*, not mere knowledge of the law (*but the doers of the Law will be justified*). Paul will tell us in Romans 3:20 that this means no human can be justified by the law because no human can fully keep the law, other than one human and that is Jesus, who is also God. It is Jesus’s sacrifice on our behalf by which we are accepted in the sight of God.

Again, Paul is setting up an argument against some Jewish authorities who have slandered his message and claim Paul is teaching wrongly (Romans 3:8). These Jewish authorities are claiming that righteousness or justice before God comes by adherence to the *law*, so Paul is setting up a counter-argument demonstrating that these authorities not only are wrong but don't even adhere to their own teaching.

It is the doing, not the saying, that matters when it comes to rules and keeping rules. Anyone can say they keep the rules, but the nature of the law is that in order to be justified before the law one must actually keep the *law*—not just claim to keep it.

If someone depends on the *law*, they will be judged by the law. So, disobedience of the law (sin, which we all do) will bring us condemnation under the law.

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Biblical Text

12 For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law; 13 for it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified.

