

## “Satan’s Greatest Lie” (Romans 2:17–29)

Many years ago a man in San Francisco was caught speeding. The man blew through an intersection without realizing there was a camera on the traffic light. A couple weeks later he received in the mail a picture of his car and a ticket for \$40. Since he had never had a ticket like this before, he decided to have a little fun. So he wrote out a check for \$40, took a picture of the check and sent the picture back to the police department. A couple of days later, the police responded in return and sent him a picture. This time it was of handcuffs. He got the point, and they got their money.

There are some laws that we just can’t get away from. One such a law is this: Trusting in religion brings condemnation. Religion on the whole has been Satan’s great counterfeit to true spirituality. Religion has done far more damage to the church than all the atheists, communists, and world-class sinners.<sup>1</sup> Religion is Satan’s greatest lie because it keeps so many people out of God’s heaven. I guess you could rightly say: *Religion is all pain, no gain.*<sup>2</sup>

The overall purpose of Romans 1–3 is to level humankind under sin. Paul begins with Gentiles who are guilty of blatant disobedience (1:18–32). He then pronounces the moralist guilty of counterfeit obedience (2:1–16). Now in 2:17–29, Paul, a Hebrew of Hebrews, goes after his own people the Jews and demonstrates that even the Jew is a sinner who stands guilty before God. Paul issues two timely warnings that have greater relevance to us.

**1. Beware of religious overconfidence (2:17–24).** With this section Paul begins a long sentence in which he piles up description after description of the Jews’ privileges (2:17–20), only to show that these blessings mean little because Jews have not lived up to their privileges (2:21–24). Like all good speakers, Paul begins with the positive. In 2:17–20, he summarizes three great privileges or advantages the Jews held over the Gentiles.<sup>3</sup> The first privilege of the Jews is their name. Paul writes in 2:17a, **“But if you bear the name Jew.”**<sup>4</sup> The name “Jew” means “praise to Yahweh.” This name reminded them that they were privileged among all the people of the world—they were God’s chosen people.<sup>5</sup> So proud were they of this name that many of the Jews living in Gentile cities used it as a surname such as Keith Krell, Jew.<sup>6</sup> In the same way, many modern day churchgoers pride themselves in their names: conservative, charismatic, Pentecostal, evangelical, Baptist, and Presbyterian just to name a few. It’s so easy to brag on a preacher or writer. It’s even possible to get caught up in one’s Bible College or seminary alma mater. Yet, a principle that we must always bear in mind is: When people are steeped in religion, they talk about names and churches; when people are steeped in Christianity, they talk about Jesus. We must be careful to distinguish between religion and a relationship with Christ. *Religion is all pain, no gain.* A relationship with Jesus, however, is the difference between pain and gain.

The second privilege of the Jews is their book. In 2:17b–18 Paul writes that the Jews **“rely<sup>7</sup> upon the Law<sup>8</sup> and boast<sup>9</sup> in God, and know His will and approve<sup>10</sup> the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law.”** The Jews possessed the Old Testament and were the keepers of the Law. They knew God’s will in a way the Romans and Greeks never knew it. They knew what was right and what was wrong. They were a people of the book! Sadly, they often failed to see the big picture (i.e., recognize Jesus was the Messiah promised in the Old Testament) to fulfill their primary calling (i.e., be a light to the Gentiles). Likewise, a great danger that we face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is getting high on our knowledge of the Bible without allowing it to affect our lives. Unlike the Jews, we utilize the full revelation of God’s Word—all sixty-six books. We have multiple versions, cutting edge Bible software, and the Bible on CD and Mp3. Here in America we have every opportunity to know God’s Word. But we must ensure that we don’t fool ourselves into assuming that we know the God of the Bible when all we really know are the contents of the Bible. As R.E.M. once sang, “We need to ‘lose our religion.’” The reason for this seemingly extreme measure is *religion is all pain, no gain.*

The third privilege of the Jews is their works. In 2:19–20, Paul lists four advantages the Jews made for themselves: “. . . **you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth.**” These are pretty heavy claims, yet Paul never contradicts them. Each of these claims is good if used in the right way. If you widen the lens to take in all three advantages, they are all outward—a name, a book, and a series of good works. None of those things touch the heart, and since they don’t touch the heart, they can all be faked. They require no inward change. Without a change of heart, the Jew has no advantage at all! The truth applies to us as well. We must be careful not to place confidence in our Christian service, whether it’s children’s ministry, youth ministry, the worship team, or pastoral ministry. Our confidence must be in Christ, not works.

I like to watch boxing and I like to practice boxing. I bring up boxing because in 2:17–20, Paul was shadowboxing. In 2:21–24, he abruptly turns aggressive and his blows become lethal as he confronts the Jew with the disparity between what he teaches others and his own manner of life.<sup>11</sup> Paul’s right hand comes over the top and breaks the jaw of the Jew with four consecutive questions. This series of questions is an attempt by Paul to turn the complacent Jew back on himself to search his own soul. The Jewish religious leaders of Paul’s day were notorious for their inconsistency and hypocrisy in respect to the Scriptures. Paul begins with the thesis question in 2:21a, “. . . **you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself?**”<sup>12</sup> The word “therefore” (*oun*) links 2:21–24 with 2:17–20. Paul argues that, given all the amazing advantages listed in 2:17–20, it seems that the Jews would teach themselves. It is important that we apply the sermon to ourselves first. John Calvin said, “If the preacher is not first preaching to himself, better that he falls on the steps of the pulpit and breaks his neck than preaches that sermon.”<sup>13</sup>

In 2:21b, Paul writes, “**You who preach that one should not steal, do you steal?**” The Jews were stealing from one another, perhaps by collecting extreme interest or cheating on business deals. They preached against stealing, yet they themselves broke the eighth commandment.<sup>14</sup> Paul follows this up in 2:22a with, “**You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery?**” The Jews preached against adultery but were also guilty of breaking the seventh commandment as well. Finally, Paul questions the Jews again in 2:22b, “**You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?**” God’s Law commanded Israel to destroy pagan temples in Canaan (Deut 7:1–6) and zealous Jews sometimes acted on this statute. However, they often broke the second commandment by confiscating the temples’ treasures (Deut 20:16–18; Josh 6:18–19; 20).<sup>15</sup> This isn’t the obedience that God demands. Verse 23 appears to be a fifth and final question; however, it is likely a statement since there is not a question mark in the Greek text. Thus, this verse should be translated: “**You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law**” (ESV; cf. NET, NLT). On one hand the Jews boasted in their knowledge of the Law, yet on the other hand, they were guilty of breaking the Law and dishonoring God. We would call this hypocrisy!

This past week, I was on a website with news press releases and did a search on “hypocrisy.” I discovered some hilarious examples: (1) Driving School owner drives drunk; (2) a fire station goes up in flames because it didn’t install a smoke detector; (3) a robber who dresses up in police clothing; (4) a Lowe’s Home Improvement store that failed to pass a building inspection; and (5) Typo checking software that has a typo in their press releases.<sup>16</sup> Such examples demonstrate that hypocrisy remains a problem today. It is both timeless and universal. But our major concern shouldn’t be with the Jews of Paul’s day or even other contemporary examples. We should be concerned with ourselves. Do we also commit the same or similar sins that we denounce in others? Do we slander the welfare cheats yet take deductions on our income tax return to which we’re not lawfully entitled? Do we rebuke the pornographers publicly, yet vicariously live out other people’s sexual adventures through the media? Do we decry the breakdown of the family yet head for divorce court when faced with difficult marriage problems? What about you? Are you practicing what you’re preaching? Does your life match up to your lips? If not, humble yourself, forsake the spiritual snobbery, and submit your life fully to Christ. *Religion is all pain, no gain.*

The hypocritical behavior of the Jews led to a disturbing result in 2:24. Paul explains: “**For ‘THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU’, just as it is written.**” This quotation can be traced back to Isaiah 52:5 LXX (cf. Ezek 36:20–21) where God is mocked by the Gentiles on account of Israel’s disregard for and disobedience of the Law. The Gentiles knew that Israel was God’s “chosen people.” They expected them to live accordingly. When the Jews violated God’s Law, the Gentiles “blasphemed” (*blasphemeo*) God’s name. In other words, they developed a wrong attitude about God.<sup>17</sup> On one hand, the Jews were so jealous for God’s name that they would not even pronounce it; they would substitute another word for God instead. Yet, their conduct caused the Gentiles to blaspheme that very name. The Jews utterly failed in their calling to make God known. Will we?

Friederick Nietzsche (1844–1900) once said that the best argument against Christianity is Christians.<sup>18</sup> Nietzsche was so right! We are our own worst enemies. The acid test is not so much what we say about ourselves but what the world says about God because of us! Jesus said, “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matt 5:16). Does your life point people to the Savior? Or, does your life cause people to blaspheme His holy name? We must recognize that there is nothing that God is more concerned about than His Name (i.e., His reputation and glory). Our job is to live godly and make Him look good before the nations. If we’re striving for practical righteousness in our lives, the world will sit up and take notice. If they see that we live lives of humility, integrity, and purity, they may just be attracted to what we believe.

[Confidence in one’s good works provides no assurance for salvation. God requires complete obedience. Thus, Paul exclaims, “Beware of religious overconfidence.” His second warning is . . .]

**2. Beware of religious association (2:25–29).** These verses serve as “the great reversal.”<sup>19</sup> Paul levels Jews and puts them on par with Gentiles. He does so by calling out their favorite religious work—circumcision.<sup>20</sup> He indicates that even circumcision will not ensure salvation. Paul puts it like this: “**For indeed circumcision is of value if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision**” (2:25). Paul is quite clear that circumcision is only valuable “if” (repeated twice) you continually practice the Law. For those Jews who have failed to keep the Law and are relying on their circumcision, it’s “uncircumcision.” Paul is slapping his readers silly with a spiritual 2x4. One of the greatest insults in Judaism was to call another Jew “an uncircumcised one,” and this is exactly what Paul is doing here. He’s showing no mercy on his fellow Jews! He argues that the circumcised Jew who transgresses the Law will literally “become a foreskin” (Greek). This means they are no different than a Gentile. What a slam upon these overconfident Jews!

Our primary problem in approaching these verses is that circumcision doesn’t mean to us what it meant to the Jews. To us, circumcision is an optional physical act performed on baby boys. Some are circumcised; some aren’t. Outside of the Jewish faith, few people are circumcised for religious reasons. Most undergo the procedure for hygienic reasons. But the act of circumcision was incredibly significant to Jews. God first instituted circumcision as a “sign of the covenant” that God entered into with Abraham and his descendants (Gen 17:10–14). All males descended from Abraham were to be circumcised on the eighth day as a mark of their identity as the people of God. To the Jews circumcision was intended to demonstrate that a man had committed himself to obey the Lord, and it invited God to cut off the man and his heirs if he rebelled against God. Unfortunately, many Jews came to think that the mere rite guaranteed their salvation. One Jewish Rabbi stated that Abraham himself will sit at the entrance of Hell to make sure that no circumcised man was ever cast into Hell.<sup>21</sup> However, circumcision was never meant to be an end in itself. The physical mark was meant to be accompanied by a deep spiritual commitment to God. Where commitment was absent, circumcision soon degenerated into ritualism. That’s roughly what happened over the centuries. By the first century many rabbis spoke of circumcision as if it were an automatic ticket to heaven. However, this is like placing a Mercedes Benz hood ornament on a broken down Yugo.

Circumcision was a ritual meant to be an outward sign or seal (Rom 4:11) of an inward reality. The outward ritual profits a person only if it is accompanied by the inner reality. The outward rite is worthless (of no benefit or advantage) apart from the inward reality. Apart from this, it is just ritual with no reality, a symbol with no substance. Now, in the place of circumcision, you can put a number of equivalent things: baptism, confirmation, church membership, communion, and other good works. Personally, I'm concerned for many who regard their infant baptism in much the same way the Jews regarded circumcision. Some churches even teach that baptism saves from sin and guarantees entrance into heaven. To put a sharp point on it, this is one place where the practice of infant baptism may be rightly criticized. Multiplied millions of people today are putting their hope of heaven in the fact that a priest sprinkled some water on their forehead when they were a few days old. Whatever may be said in favor of infant baptism, this is the most damning indictment against it! It can become a religious ritual that leads many people away from saving faith in Jesus Christ. Hence, when a well-meaning individual acknowledges that he or she is trusting in infant baptism or any other work for salvation, please urge this person to believe in Christ alone. *Religion is all pain, no gain.*

In 2:26–27, Paul expounds on his thought that Jews face God's judgment because they have sinned just like Gentiles. **“So if the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? And he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps<sup>22</sup> the Law, will he not judge you who though having the letter of the Law and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law?”** In these two verses Paul powerfully sets forth the truth that inner change happens without works. If the Gentile has the inward reality, then he has the one thing that really counts. The uncircumcised Gentile who perfectly keeps the Law (or as some argue: the Christian who fulfills the Law through the Spirit) is capable of surpassing the circumcised Jew who transgresses the Law. Paul even puts forth the possibility that if the uncircumcised Gentile keeps the Law he or she will judge the circumcised Jew who does not. Ouch! This is a serious slap across the face of the Jew who is reading this letter or listening to Paul's words being read.

Do you like peaches? If so, I have a can of peaches right here that I'd be willing to give you. But what you don't know is that this can of peaches is actually a can of peas. I replaced the labels, so that it has the appearance of being peaches, when in reality, it is a can of peas. (UGH! I don't know about you, but I hate canned peas.) The outside of this can is not consistent with what is inside.

In our day cans and bottles have labels on them to indicate what is inside. Circumcision was a label, and it implied that the Jew was obedient to God. However, if he was not completely obedient the label was not only worthless but misleading. The contents of the can are more important than the label. Similarly, if a Gentile was completely obedient to God, the absence of the label of circumcision was not of major consequence. The Jews had put more emphasis on the presence of the label than on the contents of the can. Paul's point is that disobedience brings condemnation and perfect obedience, hypothetically, brings salvation, regardless of whether one is a Jew or a Gentile.<sup>23</sup> Circumcision or baptism or any other rite practiced in an attempt to gain salvation is analogous to a label on a can of fruit or vegetables. If the outer label doesn't match with the inner product, something is rotten! *Religion is all pain, no gain.*

Again, let me be clear on this point. Paul is saying that all religious ritual is worthless unless something has already happened in the heart! Baptism can't save you or help you. The Lord's Supper can't save you or help you. Church membership can't save you or help you. Good works can't save you or help you. These things aren't bad—they are wonderful. God expects you to obey Him in each of these areas. But to whatever extent you base your hope of eternal life upon any of these things, you're making the same mistake the Jews made 2000 years ago. Good works are always an expression of gratitude for the gift of salvation. They are never to be equated with salvation or included in the salvation equation.

Paul closes this section by explaining positively what a true Jew is: **“For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly,<sup>24</sup> nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly;<sup>25</sup> and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter;<sup>26</sup> and his praise is not from men, but from God”** (2:28–29).<sup>27</sup> The real message of this passage may be summed up in one simple sentence: Being a Jew is not a matter of racial heritage or religious ritual, but is instead a matter of the heart. No outward circumcision will ultimately earn praise from God. Salvation is by sheer grace, for God will not share His glory with another.<sup>28</sup> The great ignorance of religion is that people don’t realize that God approves matters of the heart. He seeks a circumcision of the heart by the Spirit. This is what results in the praise of God. Why? Because what a man is inwardly is the true measure of what he is before God. The word translated “but” (*alla*) in 2:29 is the strongest contrast in the Greek language. Paul transitions from the exterior to the interior, from the body to the heart. In doing so, he uses a play on words to summarize the point of this section. The word “praise” (*epainos*) links back to the word “Jew” (*Ioudaios*) in 2:17, because the word Jew means “praise.” It comes from the Hebrew word *judah*, which means “praise.” These Jews were praising themselves because they had the rite of circumcision. This was the great mark of the true people of God.<sup>29</sup> Whenever anybody questioned their standing before God, they only had to refer to the fact that they were circumcised. Yet, they failed to appropriate true praise from God.

With this we come to the bottom line. As shocking as it may sound, there will be many church members in hell. In fact, hell will be populated with people from every religious persuasion. Why? It is because many people are locked into a false religious confidence. They trusted in religion instead of Christ. In the end, they were too religious for their own good. What are you trusting for your eternal salvation? Or, to put it more accurately: In whom are you trusting to take you to heaven? After all, salvation isn’t a what; it’s a who. The issue on the floor is your relationship with Jesus Christ. Let me give you five simple words that can take you all the way from earth to heaven. Here they are: Faith alone in Christ alone. Only Jesus can save you, so put your trust in Jesus only.

It was every business person’s nightmare. Arriving at Harv’s Metro Car Wash in Sacramento, CA were two dark-suited IRS agents demanding payment of delinquent taxes. “They were deadly serious, very aggressive, very condescending,” says Harv’s owner, Aaron Zeff. The really odd part of this: The letter that was hand-delivered to Zeff’s on-site manager showed the amount of money owed to the feds was . . . four cents. Inexplicably, penalties and taxes accruing on the debt—stemming from the 2006 tax year—were listed as \$202.31, leaving Harv’s with an obligation of \$202.35. Thank God, when it comes to our sin debt, Jesus paid it all; He didn’t leave a balance.<sup>30</sup>

Aren’t you glad that the debt you owe has been paid for by the person and work of Jesus Christ? His sinless life and His excruciating death have turned away God’s wrath and satisfied His holy demands. Your sins—past, present, future—have been forgiven, forgotten, forever. All that is necessary for you to have eternal life is to place your confidence in Jesus Christ alone. Today, will you simply acknowledge your sin and turn to the Savior?

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### **Scripture References**

Romans 2:17–29

Isaiah 52:5; Ezekiel 36:20–21

Matthew 5:13–16

Genesis 17:9–14; Deuteronomy 30:6

1 Samuel 16:7

Luke 15:11–32

Acts 15:1–29

### **Study Questions**

1. How are contemporary unbelievers similar to the ancient Jews Paul describes (Romans 2:17–20)? What do most unbelievers trust in to get them to heaven? How can I help my coworkers, neighbors, friends, and family members understand the difference between religion and relationship?
2. How is Bible knowledge both a valuable, and yet dangerous thing to have (Romans 2:17b–18)? How can I grow in Bible knowledge while avoiding the dangers of hypocrisy? How am I guilty of placing my confidence in the wrong objects or pursuits? How are my attitudes similar to those that are chastised in 2:17–24?
3. Where are the biggest inconsistencies between what the contemporary church believes and what it practices (Romans 2:21–24)? What are some examples? What impact does this inconsistency have on evangelism? What are the areas of God’s will that I know, but do not currently practice? What spiritual practices or principles have I recently taught to others that I myself am not practicing? How does God evaluate my hypocrisy?
4. How do I “blaspheme” God among my community (Romans 2:24)? How can I cultivate genuine humility, and thus, avoid hypocrisy? How honest should I be with others? Should I share all of my struggles? If I don’t, am I being a hypocrite? How should I strive to live (Matthew 5:16)?
5. Why does the fallen human heart gravitate toward ritual over reality (Romans 2:25–29)? What are the spiritual benefits and dangers of rituals? How important is it for believers to know “the things that are essential” (2:18)? Are there any Christian doctrines that I would die for? What are they? Why do I feel so strongly about these doctrines?

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> C. S. Lewis once wrote something to this effect: “If the divine call doesn’t make us better, it will make us very much worse. Of all bad men, religious bad men are the worst. Of all created beings, the wickedest is the one who originally stood in the immediate presence of God.”

<sup>2</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 58.

<sup>3</sup> The structure of Rom 2:17–20 consists of six main verbs: (1) bear, (2) rely, (3) boast, (4) know, (5) approve, and (6) be confident. And this six-fold framework details the proud self-righteousness of Jewish mankind. It’s worth noting that throughout the Scriptures six is the number of man and is always less than perfection. However, for preaching purposes, I have tried to simplify the categories down to three.

<sup>4</sup> The term *Ioudaios* (“Jew”) functions as an *inclusio* in this section, for the chapter is rounded out with a discussion of the meaning of the term (2:28–29). See also Thomas Schreiner, *Romans*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 128.

<sup>5</sup> The earliest use of the term “Jew” in the OT is found in 2 Kings 16:6.

<sup>6</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Romans: Righteousness from Heaven*. Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), Electronic ed.

<sup>7</sup> The word *epanapauo* (“to rely”) is only used one other time in the NT (Luke 10:6). BDAG s.v. *epanapauo* 2: “to find well-being or inner security, *find rest, comfort, support*.”

<sup>8</sup> The key word in these verses is the “Law” (Rom 2:17, 18, 20, 23, 25, 26, 27).

<sup>9</sup> Paul uses the verb *kauchaomai* (“boast”) four other times in Romans (2:23; 5:2, 3, 11).

<sup>10</sup> The verb *dokimazo* (“to approve”) is used earlier in Rom 1:28.

<sup>11</sup> See similar language in Everett F. Harrison and Donald A. Hagner, “Romans” in the *Revised Expositors Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 59.

<sup>12</sup> Paul is referring to Jews who taught the commandments but did not keep the commandments. Cf. the religious Jews as described by the Lord in Matt 23:1–3.

<sup>13</sup> Ed Rowell, “Before You Preach: Questions you ask yourself now may save your sermon later,” *Leadership Journal* (Fall 1997), 38.

<sup>14</sup> See Ezek 22:12; Amos 8:5; Mal 3:8–9; cf. Matt 21:13; Mark 12:40.

<sup>15</sup> Eaton explains, “The law noted the fact that the idols were often overlaid with gold or silver and it said, ‘You shall not covet the gold or the silver that is on them, nor take it for yourselves’ (Deut 7:25). The Jew denounced people who went to the temples to worship idols, yet it sometimes happened that he himself went to the temple to steal idols.” Michael Eaton, *Romans*. Preaching Through the Bible (Kent, UK: Sovereign World Trust, 2010), 47. Moo adopts this view but also provides a second and third alternative possibility: “(2) Paul may be using the word metaphorically, referring to Jews who did not pay the required ‘temple tax.’ This tax, levied on all Jews wherever they lived, was designed to support the Jerusalem temple and its ministries. Jewish texts suggest that failure to pay this tax was widespread. (3) We have some evidence that the word could refer in a vague way to sacrilege. Paul could, then, be accusing the Jews of elevating the law to such a place that it infringed on the rights and honor of God himself. While this third alternative is attractive, the first should probably be accepted, for it best accounts for the relationship between the first part of the statement and the second. Robbing pagan temples is a natural contrast to ‘abhorring idols.’” Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*. New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 164–65. On the other hand, Hoehner still prefers the view that Paul is referring to robbing the temple of tithes and offerings (cf. Mal 3:8) or robbing God of His glory in temple sacrilege (Mal 1:14). Harold W. Hoehner, “Romans” in *The Bible Knowledge Word Study* (Colorado Springs: Victor, 2006), 141.

<sup>16</sup> See [www.sermonnews.com](http://www.sermonnews.com).

<sup>17</sup> See Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 138. Cf. BDAG s.v. *blasphemo* g.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in George R. Knight, *Exploring Romans: A Devotional Commentary* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2010), 70.

<sup>19</sup> Knight, *Exploring Romans*, 72.

<sup>20</sup> Dunn states that circumcision was the “single clearest distinguishing feature of the covenant people.” James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*. Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1988), 120.

<sup>21</sup> The Midrash claims: “God swore to Abraham that no one who was circumcised would be sent to hell. Abraham sits before the gate of hell and never allows any circumcised Israelite to enter.” See Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 139–40.

<sup>22</sup> BDAG s.v. *teleo* 2: “to carry out an obligation or demand, *carry out, accomplish, perform, fulfill, keep*.”

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<sup>23</sup> Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Romans” (2010 ed.): [www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/romans.pdf](http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/romans.pdf), 30.

<sup>24</sup> Stott rightly says: “This concept is not new with Paul, since it occurs regularly in the Old Testament. In the Pentateuch God complains of his people’s ‘uncircumcised hearts’, appeals to them to circumcise their hearts, and promises that he will do it to them himself so that they may love him with all their being. Then the prophets use the same imagery. Foreigners are significantly described as ‘uncircumcised in heart and flesh’; those who are ‘circumcised only in the flesh’ and ‘uncircumcised in heart’ will be punished; Yahweh calls on his people to circumcise their hearts, and promises to give them a ‘new heart’.” John R. W. Stott, *Romans: God’s Good News for the World* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1994), 93–94.

<sup>25</sup> Stott nicely summarizes: “Human beings are comfortable with what is outward, visible, material and superficial. What matters to God is a deep, inward, secret work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.” Stott, *Romans*, 94.

<sup>26</sup> The “letter/Spirit” contrast occurs two other times in Paul’s letters (see Rom 7:6; 2 Cor 3:6).

<sup>27</sup> Elsewhere Paul speaks of believers as the true circumcision (Phil 3:3), in contrast to a party of Jewish legalists known as “the circumcision” (Gal 2:12).

<sup>28</sup> Isaiah 42:8: “I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to graven images.”

<sup>29</sup> In Rom 2:29, Paul is talking about a Jew (not a Gentile) who is a Jew inwardly. That is, he is a Jew who believes in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is not only a child of Abraham, but he is a child of God. Paul is not saying that Gentiles are Jews inwardly. Saved Gentiles are never referred to as Jews and they are never referred to as “Israel.”

<sup>30</sup> SermonNews: “IRS Tracks Down Four Cents Owed.” Source: The Sacramento Bee, March 13, 2010, Bob Shallit.