

## ***Romans – 2:17-29***

### ***Discussion Guide***

#### ***Background***

In Chapter 2 of Romans, Paul turns his attention from the Gentiles to believers from a Jewish background. If you remember, the Jewish and Gentile Christians in the Roman church have been in conflict with one another for some time, and both assume that their methods and interpretations for following Jesus are superior to the other. We can imagine the Jewish Christians listening to Paul's criticism of the Gentiles in Chapter 1, and feeling vindicated or affirmed about their "superiority" over the Gentiles.

In Chapter 2, however, Paul turns his attention to the Jewish believers, and he is just as critical of them as he was in Chapter 1. Paul wants all of the believers to understand that in God's eyes, they are equally sinful, and stand equally in need of grace and forgiveness.

Paul begins Chapter 2 by arguing the Jews "condemn themselves" by passing judgement on the Gentiles while doing the same things themselves. Some of these Jewish Christians may be openly and blatantly sinning in obvious ways. Some of them, however, need to be challenged to see how sin is impacting them in deeper, more subtle ways. Throughout the Chapter, Paul follows the example of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and in other places, as he challenges his readers to look beyond the mere letter of the law, and consider what's going on in their minds and hearts. Although they might not think of themselves as thieves, adulterers, or idol worshippers (v.21-22), Paul insinuates that they are just as guilty of these things as the Gentiles when they sin in thought, word, and motive, as well as their actions.

Paul argues that the pride and arrogance of the Jewish believers causes God's name to be blasphemed (v. 24), because their behavior and attitude runs counter to the faith that they claim to profess. Their sinful behavior has implications for their spiritual standing before God as well – Paul says it is like they are uncircumcised, and in the same position as the "non-believing" Gentiles.

It is important to understand that no amount of worship, sacrifices, tithes/offerings, etc can make any difference to the spiritual state of Paul's readers. His point in Chapters 1-2 is that all people, regardless of their background or religious experiences, are dealing with the same sin problem. All of us stand equally in need of forgiveness, and the "circumcision of the heart" that comes through faith (v. 29). Paul's desire is that the Jewish and Gentile believers in Rome would no longer think of themselves as any different or better than the other. At the foot of the cross, they all stand equally in need of rescuing from the sin that pulls them away from God, and creates a barrier in their relationship with Him.

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### ***Discussion Questions***

- 1) Why is it important that Paul critiques the Jews as well as the Gentiles at the beginning of Romans?
- 2) Can you give an example of sin that is deeper or more subtle than our outward behavior?
- 3) Do you think modern Christians ever “blaspheme God’s name” through their behavior? If so, how?
- 4) How are you tempted to try to “earn” your salvation or God’s love?
- 5) What religious activities or rituals do you see people trusting in too heavily in the American church?
- 6) Where/how do you need to be more open about sins and struggles in your own life? What would that look like practically?