

## Romans: Verse-by-Verse

---

Romans 2:13-16

### Student Notes

- **A universal knowledge of God's Law:**

. The Law of Moses for the Jews. 2. God's Moral Law for the Gentiles. Both the Judaic and Moral Law are the indispensable basis of God's judgment.

Verses 13 & 14: "For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law...")

- **The Two Foundational Points Of Divine Judgment:**

The Mosaic Law is a basis of divine judgment. The Jews will be judged by the special revelation they had through the Law, the Prophets, and the Torah. Thus, they will be judged by the Law.

The Gentiles will be judged by natural revelation. They knew God through creation – and initially through relationship – but over time they chose not to know God. Therefore, they will be judged by natural revelation.

The overall thrust: Both Jews and Gentiles have some knowledge of God and his requirements. No human being can plead complete innocence or ignorance.

- **What About The Gentiles?**

Verse 14: "Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law..."

1. Paul is saying that we have all sinned against God's moral law. We may have known God's moral law by one of two things: by general revelation or by special revelation.

F.F. Bruce: "Whether we have come to know it by special or general revelation, by grace or nature, outward or inward, by the Scripture or in the heart, is largely irrelevant. The point is that all human beings have suppressed the truth in order to indulge in wickedness. So we all come under the righteous judgment of God." F.F Bruce

(See: Romans 1:18 and 2:8)

- **Digging Deeper:** (Back to verses 12&13)

"All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous."

Is it possible to be righteous by the Law? No, Paul is saying those under the Law were responsible to obey the Law. Only Christ's sacrifice retroactively covered those who attempted to obey the Law. (See Hebrews 11:39-40)

The Reality: None of the Old Testament believers were able to keep the Law perfectly. Like us, they all sinned and came short of God's perfection, of His glory.

The relationship between verse 13 and Deuteronomy 18:5: Paul writes, "For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous." Deuteronomy 18:5 says, "Keep my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. I am the LORD."

Is Paul holding out hope that some may be justified by the Law? No, absolutely not! That's clear from Romans and Galatians. See: Romans 3:20; Galatians 2:16; Galatians 3:11

No one is justified by the Jewish Law – but they can, indeed, be covered retroactively by Christ’s “once for all” sacrifice.

- **The Gentiles’ Situation:**

“If the Jew can’t be justified by the Jewish Law, what about the Gentiles?”  
What can they appeal to?

Look at verses 14-15:

“Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.”

Paul has switched “laws” here. He’s not talking about the Law of Moses since the Gentiles did not receive that Law. He’s talking about “God’s Moral Law” that was set in motion when he created the very first humans.

Humans have an instinctive sense of “God’s Moral Law” – even though they are spiritually fallen.

- **The Inward Witness: “Conscience”**

The word “conscience”, “suneidesis” came from every-day Greek. It meant consciousness of right or wrong doing. Paul’s new uses: An independent, internal witness which examines and passes judgment on a one’s conduct.

Example: Almost all native cultures have some basic rules of morality. Where did such basic concepts come from? The Bible declares that humans were originally created in the image of God. That includes God’s character of holiness.

Paul: Even the Gentiles, who don’t have the Jewish Law demonstrate that God’s Moral Law is still with them. They demonstrate that the Moral parts of the Law are still within them – at least to some degree.

Verse 15: “They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.”

Even though the Gentiles did not have the Jewish Law given to them or taught to them, they still had the moral requirements of the Law written in their hearts. Therefore, in the judgment they will be responsible for those sinful impulses they followed.

Natural law cannot save humans any more than natural religion. Whatever sense of God’s Moral Laws humans possessed, they rejected them in favor of self-advancement. (See: Ecclesiastes 7:20)

Verse 16: “This will take place on the day when God will judge men’s secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.”

A Gentile’s conscience may not be perfect, but it is still operational enough to know the basic difference between right and wrong. At the Judgment, their own conscience will convict them for the times they have broken God’s Moral Law.

- **The Final Analysis: Guilt At the Judgment:**

On the final Day of Judgment, no individual, Jew or Gentile, will be able to claim complete ignorance of God’s requirements.

The Jews will be judged as those who had special revelation. The Gentiles will be judged as those who had creation and an inward moral compass consisting of God’s Moral Law and their conscience.

Both will found guilty. As we will see ... that is why the Gospel is so important to Paul.