Ignoring The Law's Requirements

Devotional Scripture: 1 Peter 1:13-23

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Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson reviews the examples of religion going wrong by Ignoring The Law's Requirements. The study's aim is to understand that, as Christians, we need to put into action what we say we believe. The study's application is to so order our lives that we act from the heart on our belief in the truth.

(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)

Key Verse: Rom 1:20

but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.

Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

CONDEMNATION BECAUSE OF THEIR HYPOCRISY (2:17-24)

Paul undoubtedly had the Jews as well as moral Gentiles in mind in the group he addressed as “you who pass judgment on someone else” (v. 1). But there he did not refer to them by name as he did here—if you call yourself a Jew (lit., “if you are named a Jew”). In Greek this is a first-class conditional sentence in which the conditional statement is assumed to be true. Paul was addressing individuals who were truly called Jews and who, in fact, gloried in that name. This fact is followed by a list of eight other moral and religious details in which the Jews gloried in their sense of superiority to the Gentiles, all of these included as part of the “if” clause (vv. 17-21a). The verbs used in this list are all in the present tense or have the force of the present, which emphasizes the habitual nature of the action: (1) The Jews rely on the Law; they put their confidence in the fact that God gave it to them. (2) The Jews brag about their relationship to God (lit., “boast in God”; cf. v. 23), which means they glory in their covenantal ties with God. As a result of these two things the Jews (3) know His will (they have an awareness of God’s desires and plan) and they (4) approve of (dokimezaēs, “to test and approve what passes the test”) what is superior (diapheronta, “the things that differ and as a result excel”; the same Gr. word in Phil. 1:10 is trans. “what is best”). They have a concern for spiritually superior standards. These abilities of Jews exist because they (5) are instructed (lit., “are being instructed”) by the Law. Their catechetical lessons as youths and the regular reading of the Law in the synagogues provided this continuing instruction. Though the next verb (in Rom. 2:19) continues the first-class conditional structure begun in verse 17, it also marks a transition of thought. It is the perfect tense of a verb which means “to seek to persuade,” in which tense it has the meaning “to believe.” (6) Many Jews were convinced and as a result believed certain things about themselves in relationship to Gentiles. Paul listed four of these: a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor (paideutēn, “one who disciplines, a trainer”) of the foolish, and a teacher of infants. (7) This belief by Jews rested in their having in the Law the embodiment (morphōsin, “outline, semblance”; used elsewhere in the NT only in 2 Tim. 3:5) of knowledge and truth (the Gr. has the definite article “the” with both nouns: “the knowledge and the truth”). Without doubt as Paul enumerated this list of moral and religious distinctions, he got repeated affirmative responses from his Jewish readers. The Jews gloried in their special spiritual position, which contrasted with the Gentiles. The apostle then summed up all these distinctives in the clause, (8) You, then, who teach others. Then Paul asked the question, Do you not teach yourself? This question is followed by a series of questions on specific prohibitions in the Law—against stealing, committing adultery, hating idols—each of which a Jew (“you” throughout Rom. 2:17-27 is sing., not pl.) was guilty of doing after telling others not to do those things. Paul indicted such a Jew for hypocrisy: You who brag about (“are boasting in”; cf. v. 17) the Law, do you dishonor God by breaking the Law? An honest Jew would have to respond to Paul’s questions by admitting his guilt and his hypocrisy. Paul did not condemn this hypocrisy of the Jews on his own authority; he quoted their own Scriptures (the close of Isa. 52:5, in the LXX). Their hypocrisy dishonored God; also it caused Gentiles to blaspheme God. “Why should we honor God,” Gentiles may have reasoned, “when His Chosen People do not follow Him?”

CONDEMNATION BECAUSE OF THEIR TRUST IN RITES (2:25-29)

The Jews trusted not only in the Law of Moses, as the preceding paragraph shows (vv. 17-24), but also in circumcision as the sign of their special covenantal relationship with God. But Paul argued that trust in the rite itself was meaningless and was a basis for God’s judgment. Circumcision has value if you observe (“are practicing”) the Law. Conversely, if you break the Law (and they did), you have become as
though you had not been circumcised. In the Greek this second part of verse 25 is interesting: “If you are a lawbreaker, your circumcision has become a foreskin.” In other words a Jewish lawbreaker is just like a Gentile lawbreaker; the Jews’ rite of circumcision counts for nothing. The opposite is also true. **If those who are not circumcised (lit., “if the foreskin,” a word used by Jews as a slang expression for a Gentile; cf. the comments on v. 25) keep (phyllasē, “guard” and therefore “keep” or “observe”; cf. 1 Tim. 5:21) the Law’s requirements (and apparently some Gentiles did), will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised?** Paul concluded that a Gentile who obeys (“fulfills”) the Law judges a Jew who, despite his having the written code and circumcision, is a lawbreaker. A Gentile who obeys what the Law requires, even though he does not know the Law (Rom. 2:14) is in God’s sight similar to a circumcised Jew. This thought would be revolutionary for Jews who considered themselves far superior to Gentiles (cf. vv. 17-21). These verses form the conclusion to the entire section that begins with verse 17. Being a true or genuine Jew is not a matter of outward or external things (such as wearing phylacteries, paying tithes, or being circumcised). Genuine circumcision is not the physical rite itself. Rather, a genuine Jew is one inwardly and true circumcision is... of the heart and by the Spirit. The NIV has rendered the Greek words “in spirit” as “by the Spirit,” as though they refer to the Holy Spirit. However, it is better to understand this verse as saying that circumcision of heart fulfills “the spirit” of God’s Law instead of mere outward conformity to the Law. Some Jews followed the Law’s regulation outwardly, but their hearts were not right with God (Isa. 29:13). A circumcised heart is one that is “separated” from the world and dedicated to God. The true Jew receives his praise... not from men (as did the Pharisees) but from God, who sees people’s inward natures (cf. Matt. 6:4, 6) and discerns their hearts (cf. Heb. 4:12).

**Commentary from The Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary**

Our lesson text concerns the classic problem of mere external religion versus inward salvation. The religious Jew is addressed throughout the passage surrounding the text, and we must remember what that involved. The Jews had the Old Testament law, and they had counted and listed all the commands of the Old Testament. They also had developed many rabbinical laws, which they believed would give help in keeping the laws and commands of God's Word. They embraced all this and taught it to others (cf. Rom. 2:17-20). They believed that this, along with circumcision, the sign of religious duty, would keep them safe before God. Yet none of them could keep all of God's laws perfectly. Clearly, something more is needed than circumcision and mere human effort to conform to the requirements of God's laws. It is tempting for people everywhere to seek satisfaction in God through religious duties. This is done throughout the whole world. Even in our churches, many are tempted to think that God is satisfied by regular church attendance or participation in sacraments or rituals. But no external religious deed alone can save us or deliver us from the breaking of God's commands (cf. Rom. 2:25). Circumcision of the flesh could not save the Jew, and no mere religious deed can save anyone, for the plain truth is that every person is a lawbreaker. So what our text points out is that we must see that the law's true intent is to show the need of inward conversion rather than just outward religion. This is emphasized in three ways. First, a true Jew or true believer is determined by what happens inwardly. The external practices of religious duty do not have saving power. A true work of God's Spirit must penetrate our inner man. Next, emphasis is placed on the fact that truth must extend to the heart. True circumcision, the one that really counts, is the one that removes the guilt by faith alone, in Christ alone. Sometimes this can be difficult. We are tearing down a well-built house. Yet as our text makes clear, true circumcision is that of the heart. Someone has said that it is impossible to avoid offending guilty men. Maybe that is so. But when we challenge religious law keeping, many may be led to the Saviour. Let us seek to build a house of grace and not of works.

**Lesson Introduction and Background**

**From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary**

The story is told that when Queen Elizabeth II of England was a young girl, her father, King George VI, told her to do something. “I am a princess,” she is said to have replied, “and I will do as I please.” “Yes, you are a princess,” said her father. “And that is why, for the rest of your life, you will never simply do as you please.”
Privilege brings not just honor or power but responsibility. The greater the privilege, the greater the responsibility. Our lesson text is a solemn restatement of this principle. Paul reminded his Christian readers of Jewish background that their high calling as guardians of God’s law carried the responsibility of obedience. This is a responsibility that they, along with all people, had failed.

Among Paul’s aims in his letter to the church at Rome is to demonstrate that the gospel is God’s power for salvation for both Jew and Gentile (Romans 1:16). Both had failed to submit to the God who created them and revealed himself to them, despite any claim of advantage one group might press over the other. Although Gentiles had not received the special revelation of God’s law that had been given to Israel through Moses, Gentiles were nonetheless fully responsible for their rebellion against God. This is because God had sufficiently revealed himself and his will to them in creation itself (Romans 1:18-20). In Romans 2, Paul turned to Jews to show them the problem of their own situation. Israel’s law and history stood together in Israel’s sacred Scriptures. That history showed repeatedly the failure of those who received God’s law to keep it. Any advantage that Israel had in receiving God’s law at Sinai had been squandered through disobedience. This realization could come to Jews through more than just reading their people’s history in the Scriptures. Observing the world around them could demonstrate the same. Many Jews of the period regarded the priestly leadership of the temple as corrupt and illegitimate. Pressure to conform to social norms meant that many Jews lived more like their Gentile neighbors than as people devoted to God’s law. There were few reasons for religiously sensitive Jews to think that their generation was better at keeping God’s law than their ancestors had been. For those who thought otherwise, Paul had some sobering—and stern—reminders.

Major Theme Analysis

*(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)*

**Ignoring By Not Keeping the Law (Rom 2:17-24)**

17 Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, 18 and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, 19 and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, 20 an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. 21 You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? 22 You who say, “Do not commit adultery,” do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? 23 You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? 24 For "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you," as it is written.

**By boasting on works (17)**

*Because boasting on works ignores God’s gift (Eph 2:8-9)*

8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast.

*Because boasting on works ignores faith (Rom 3:27-28)*

27 Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. 28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

*Because boasting on works ignores grace (Rom 11:6)*

6 And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

*Because boasting on works ignores God's purposes (2 Tim 1:8-9)*

8 So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, 9 who has saved us and called us to a holy life — not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time,
Because boasting on works ignores God's mercy (Titus 3:4-7)

4 But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

By self-confidence in knowledge (18-20)

Because human knowledge is frustrated by God (1 Cor 1:18-21)

18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." 20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.

Because human knowledge is foolishness in God's sight (1 Cor 3:18-19)

18 Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a "fool" so that he may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness";

Because true knowledge comes from God (Eph 1:6-9)

6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace 8 that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. 9 And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ,

Because human knowledge puffs one up (1 Cor 8:1-2)

8 Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. 2 The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know.

Because human knowledge makes one wise in his own eyes (Prov 26:12)

12 Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

By being a hypocrite (21-24)

Because hypocrisy shuts the kingdom of heaven from others (Matt 23:13)

13 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

Because hypocrisy causes us to fail seeing our own sin (Luke 6:42)

42 How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Because hypocrisy causes divisions and obstacles (Rom 16:17-18)

17 I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. 18 For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.

Because hypocrisy causes actions to not agree with words (Titus 1:15-16)

15 To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. 16 They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.
Because hypocrisy causes one to neglect important things (Matt 23:23-24)

23 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices — mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law — justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. 24 You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.

Ignoring By Relying On Ceremony (Rom 2:25-27)

25 For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.
26 Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision?
27 And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law?

Ceremony versus obedience (25)

Because obedience is greater than sacrifices and offerings (1 Sam 15:22)

22 But Samuel replied: "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.

Because obedience is an obligation (Rom 8:12-14)

12 Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation — but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. 13 For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, 14 because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

Because obedience should be done regardless of circumstances (Dan 3:16-18)

16 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. 17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. 18 But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

Because One cannot be in an intimate relationship with Jesus without obedience (John 15:14)

14 You are my friends if you do what I command.

Because one cannot be successful without obedience (Joshua 1:8)

8 Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

Ceremony versus God's judgment (26-27)

Because all will appear at God's judgment (2 Cor 5:10)

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

Because man is destined to face God's judgment (Heb 9:27)

27 Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment,

Because we must be prepared for God's judgment (Amos 4:12)

12 "Therefore this is what I will do to you, Israel, and because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel."
Because the stubborn and unrepentant should expect God's judgment (Rom 2:5)

5 But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.

Because through God's judgment He knows how to rescue and punish (2 Peter 2:9)

9 if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.

Ignoring By Relying On Family Ties (Rom 2:28-29)

28 For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; 29 but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.

Not outward but inward (28)

Because the outward can produce wrong impressions (2 Cor 10:7)

7 Do you look at things according to the outward appearance? If anyone is convinced in himself that he is Christ's, let him again consider this in himself, that just as he is Christ's, even so we are Christ's.

Inward because God knows the heart (Luke 16:15)

15 He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.

Inward because God understands motives (1 Chron 28:9)

9 "And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the Lord searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you forever.

Inward because God searches the heart and mind (Jer 17:10)

10 "I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve."

Inward because nothing is hidden from God (Heb 4:13)

13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Because outward judgments are not valid (John 7:24)

24 Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment."

God view of the circumcision of the heart (29)

It is to remove stubbornness (Deut 10:16)

16 Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer.

It is to aid in loving God (Deut 30:6)

6 The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.

It is to avoid God's wrath (Jer 4:4)

4 Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, circumcise your hearts, you men of Judah and people of Jerusalem, or my wrath will break out and burn like fire because of the evil you have done — burn with no one to quench it.
It is done by God only (Col 2:11)

11 In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ,

It is a way to avoid putting confidence in the flesh (Phil 3:3)

3 For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

Paul sets out in these last verses of chapter 2 to point out all that the Jew relied upon for righteousness before God. He shows that these prove to be no means of providing righteousness, but rather are a millstone about their necks, making them more guilty than the pagans they so enthusiastically condemned.

(1) The Jew and the Law (Romans 2:17-24). If there was one thing the Jew prided himself on, it was his possession of the Law. It was delivered to Jews, through Jews. It had been preserved and passed down by Jews. The Jews felt that mere possession of the Law constituted righteousness.

Verses 17-20 grant that the Jew not only possesses the Law, but understands it so fully that they are able to communicate it to others. However, man’s righteousness does not result from possessing the Law; it comes from practicing the Law. So Paul turns the tables on his audience when he writes, “You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one should not steal, do you steal? You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?” (Romans 2:21-22).

The Law sets the standards of righteousness for men. Mere possession of that Law does not constitute men as righteous in the eyes of God. To be a custodian of God’s Law was indeed a great privilege, but Paul reminds the Jew that with this privilege comes that added responsibility of greater knowledge.

The Jews’ pride in the Law was ill-founded, for they did not keep the requirements of the Law. They not only failed to live by the Law, they failed to live righteously before the Gentiles. They who were so quick to condemn the Gentiles were slow to confess that because of their sinfulness and rebellion the name of God was blasphemed among the Gentiles (Romans 2:24).

This quotation from Isaiah 52:5 was a reference to the fact that during the Babylonian exile of the Jews the humiliation of the nation, Israel, was such that the Gentiles mocked their God, Whom they thought was unable to deliver His people. The application to Israel’s present condition was similar. The rebellion of Israel against God again brought the disciplinary hand of God to the extent that the Jews and their God were lightly esteemed, even a mockery among the nations. Israel was to bring glory to God, but her rebellion and chastening made them a mockery. God’s name, which the Jews esteemed so highly that they would not even pronounce it, was a byword among the heathen because of Israel’s sin.

(2) The Jew and Circumcision (Romans 2:25-27). There are many through the history of mankind who have regarded religion as primarily a matter of ceremony and ritual. The rite upon which the Jew rested his standing before God was circumcision. This rite will be fully discussed by Paul in chapter 4, but here Paul makes the point that circumcision is an outward act which symbolizes some inward reality. The rite has no value without the reality.

Circumcision was the sign of the Old Testament covenant between God and His people. The covenant obligations of the Jew were prescribed by the Law. But in failing to keep the Law the Jews indicated their rejection of the covenant, and thus the rite of circumcision was a meaningless act. It is like one who puts on a wedding band as he makes a marriage covenant with his bride. The ring itself is nothing but a symbol. It has great value if the vows are kept, but it is an empty sham if the vows are violated and set aside.

As one may be married without the presence of a ring, so one may be in relationship with God without circumcision. Any Gentile who could keep the requirements of the Law would be reckoned as one who had received the rite of circumcision for the reality was present without the symbol. But the symbol apart from the reality is worthless.

(3) Spirituality versus Superficiality (Romans 2:28-29). The entire issue with the Jews can be summarized in terms of spirituality and superficiality. The Jew was relying on superficialities for his righteous standing before God. He relied on his physical relationship to Abraham, on a possession of the Law and in the practice of rites and rituals such as circumcision. But God does not judge on the basis of externals. Righteousness is a matter of the heart. As our Lord had said to the self-righteous Jews of His day, “And He was saying, ‘That which
proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness’” (Mark 7:20-22).

Application

My friend, what is it that you are relying on for right standing before God? When you stand before Him, on what basis will you expect to spend eternity in His heaven?

By the keeping of some set of ethics? You will fail. The kind of righteousness which is necessary to please God is perfect righteousness. If you are trying to keep the Law of God you must keep it in every detail or you fail completely (James 2:10). Do you have some other standard of righteousness? You will not abide by it either, for none of us can live by the standards which we set for others.

Are you trusting in some rite or ritual for right standing before God? They are all meaningless without inner righteousness, demonstrated by our works. Have you been baptized? As a friend of mine says, “You can be baptized until the tadpoles know your Social Security number.” That will never get you to heaven. Have you been christened, confirmed, circumcised, canonized? None of these rites will get you one inch closer to heaven. Church membership, partaking of the Lord’s Table, all of these are of profit if they symbolize your relationship by faith to Jesus Christ.

My friend, if the Jew with all his misdirected zeal cannot be declared righteous before God, neither can you or I. The message of the gospel, the good news, is that what you and I can never earn, God has provided as a gift. If you have come to the point where you acknowledge that you have nothing to commend you to God, nothing which merits your eternity in the presence of God, then accept the righteousness of Jesus Christ by faith. Trust in His sacrifice in your place, and in His righteousness in place of yours, and you will have eternal life.

There is a particularly relevant warning in this passage for those of us who have been exposed to the teaching of the Scriptures. God is not nearly as concerned with what we know about doctrine as He is with what we are doing with what we know. Let us not get puffed up about the knowledge we possess and look down our spiritual noses at the spiritually underprivileged lest we, like the Jews, be found guilty by God.

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock. And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and it fell, and great was its fall” (Matthew 7:24-27).

(Adapted from URL: https://bible.org/seriespage/4-no-excuse-jews-romans-2)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The Israelites’ failure to keep God’s law affected not just themselves. God’s promise was that all nations would be blessed through Abraham’s offspring (Genesis 22:18), that Israel would become “a light for the Gentiles” (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6). So it seemed that Israel’s unfaithfulness could prove to be the undoing of God’s plans for the world. But the gospel reveals something vital. Though Israel proved unfaithful, God brought his plan to fulfillment through one in Israel who did prove faithful, namely Jesus. His faithfulness, seen in submitting to death on the cross to take the punishment of the guilty, fulfilled God’s purpose and solved the problem of human failure for both Jews and Gentiles. How great is our failure? The cross shows us. How powerful is God’s solution to our failure? The cross shows us. For the vast majority of us today, claiming spiritual privilege because of Jewish identity or circumcision seems very foreign. But we know how easy it is to claim such privilege on similar grounds. Looking at the chaotic world around us, we are tempted to congratulate ourselves that we know God and his Word. It is easy to observe the ignorance of the world and contrast that ignorance with what we know of God. Then it is all too easy to take the next step and think the difference has to do with something special about ourselves. We would be better off contemplating the contrast between the good that other people see in us outwardly and the evil that we know still lives in our hearts. That reflection will lead us to think how God has welcomed us by his grace despite our failures. That in turn will remind us of how much we have in common with the world and of how much we have to share with it.
Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

1. We are never saved to boast about what we know but rather to draw others to the One we know (Rom. 2:17)
2. We must remember that it can be easy to teach others that they should obey God's Word and yet be deceived in our own walk with Him (vss. 18-20)
3. Those who know God's Word but live in disobedience are just as guilty as those less knowledgeable (vss. 21-24)
4. Hypocrites often deceive themselves by observing religious rituals and ordinances while their hearts are far from God (vss. 25-27)
5. It shows that we belong to God when our hearts are right with Him (vss. 28-29)
6. For Christians, the highest praise comes from God (vs. 29)