



## Group Discussion Guide

### Romans 2:17-29

*For groups meeting January 26 evening through February 2 morning.*

In this week's reading, Paul continues to build his case for justification by faith. Verses 17-29 are addressed to believers who call themselves Jews (v. 17). He then lists characteristics of those to whom he is writing. These Jews 1) relied on the law, 2) boasted in their special relationship to God, 3) knew His will, 4) approved what is excellent (valued high spiritual standards) (vs. 17-18).

Their mindset was based upon the fact that God had chosen to give His law to their ancestors. The law truly was at the center of Jewish life. Young children were educated in the law by their parents and males were given further education in the law as they grew older (like other ancient cultures, in Jewish culture females were primarily responsible for taking care of the household while males worked a trade to provide financially for the family, and this mindset also spilled over into the realm of education in the law; it was believed that females only needed a basic understanding of the Jewish law). The instruction of the law was paramount, and because they were "instructed from the law" (v. 18) those who found their identity in being Jewish often had the mindset characterized in verses 17-18.

Also, these people believed they had the ability to guide those who were blind, to be a light to those who were in darkness, to instruct those who were foolish and to teach children. (vs. 19-20). This perceived ability was based on their possession of and understanding of the law.

However, Paul called into question the character of their lives. He pointed out that these Jewish believers did not obey the very law they worked to teach (vs. 21-23). The questions he asked dealt with stealing, adultery and having any association with items related to the worship of false gods. We must keep in mind that Jesus raised the standard of the law (the sermon on the mount in Matthew 5-7). Therefore, these Jewish believers would have to admit their own guilt when confronted by Paul. After pointing out their hypocrisy, Paul then directed them to Isaiah 52:5 and told them that instead of leading Gentiles to the Lord, they actually caused Gentiles to dishonor Him (v. 24).

Paul closes this portion of his case by using the Jewish rite of circumcision to demonstrate that their Jewish heritage was not a basis for their justification before God. Those who were circumcised according to the law but who did not keep the whole law were no better than those who were uncircumcised and did not keep the law (v. 25). Conversely, if someone who was uncircumcised kept the law, he would be considered a Jew even more than someone who was uncircumcised and did not keep the law (v. 26). Paul concluded, "circumcision is a matter of the heart" (v. 29). His point was this: one becomes a child of God because of a change of heart, not through heritage or tradition.

## Discussion Questions

1. How would you describe the people Paul was addressing in this section of Scripture?
2. Do you see any similarities between yourself and these people? If so, what are they?
3. What do you think is the difference between “boasting in God” as these people do, and “boasting in the Lord” as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:31? Look at the larger passage of 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 to gain a better understanding.
4. How is it possible for someone who boasts in the law to also break that same law? What type of mindset leads to this course of action?
5. Paul’s discussion of circumcision in verses 25-29 might at first seem somewhat foreign to those of us who do not have a Jewish background. How can you identify with what Paul has written? Can you name some ways that people in our culture claim they are justified before God based on their family history or religious traditions?
6. Paul writes that “circumcision is a matter of the heart.” What does he mean by this? Can you remember a time in your life that you focused more on outward conformity than you did on the state of your heart? What was that like?
7. Is it possible to focus too much on teaching people to “follow the rules” of Christianity? How can we effectively lead others to follow the way of Jesus? How can we teach them to do right without leading them to conform outwardly and yet not be transformed inwardly?
8. How does this entire section of Paul’s writing help build his case that we can only be justified before God by faith in Jesus Christ?