

The book of Romans seeks to convince people of their helplessness against sin and their need for the gospel. He has already shown that all Gentiles are made responsible to God by His testimony toward them. Primitive peoples have the testimony of creation (1:19-20). Those who have a more developed system of morality still must endure the accusations of their conscience (2:15). But the Jew has the clearest testimony of all: The holy Scriptures (3:2). In this passage Paul contends with Jews who think their covenant relationship with God makes them sufficiently righteous.

A Jewish man from his birth would have been steeped in apparent righteousness. He would have heard the righteous words of God read in the synagogue, performed righteous acts of sacrifice in the temple, seen symbols of righteousness in the temple furnishings and priests' garments, and have borne on his body the mark of righteous separation to God – circumcision. How natural, how human, if he were to assume that righteousness had somehow rubbed off on him.

But verse 2:29 reminds us that God looks not on our environment, apparel, or bodies. He looks at our hearts, Jew or Gentile. He looks for His Spirit. And what are the signs that the Spirit can be found in us? Love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control – God's testimony through those who believe in His son and bear His name.

Questions:

1. The Jews whom Paul criticizes in verses 17-24 boast of having been instructed in the law and teaching it to others. What did they fail to learn from the law?
2. Verse 22 charges the hypocrite with sacrilege or robbing temples (also see Acts 19:37). This probably refers to a known practice among the Jews of not worshiping idols but buying and selling figures stolen from temples. How does this illustrate the general problem here?
3. What effect does hypocrisy have on our testimony? On the name of God among unbelievers?

4. Circumcision of the heart is also praised in Deut. 10:16, Deut. 30:6, Josh. 5:1, and Jer. 4:4. How would you describe a person with a circumcised heart?
5. Verses 3:1-8 are written as a debate, with a series of questions and responses. What are the questions and how does Paul respond?
6. Verse 4 cites Psalm 51:4. Who is the Jew who was unfaithful to God? How did God prove faithful to him?
7. Paul does not actually answer the last question, but denounces those who ask it. You might have heard a similar question: “If all your sins past and future are forgiven just by believing in Jesus, why not sin to your heart’s content?” How would **you** answer?