

DEVOTIONAL

WHEN IN ROME II // NO SECRETS
JUNE 27, 2021

GRACE
FELLOWSHIP

Discussion Starter: How do people know right from wrong?

Key Text: *“For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. ¹³ For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. ¹⁴ For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵ They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them ¹⁶ on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.” (Romans 2:12-16)*

Jiminy Cricket Was Only Half Right

Fyona Campbell became famous for setting the world record as the first woman to walk around the world. In the United States, she walked from New York to Los Angeles; in Australia, she walked from Sydney to Perth, and in Europe, she crossed the French Pyrenees. Her 11-year, 19,586-mile trek across five continents wore out 100 pairs of tennis shoes. But her joy was short-lived. Despite the fame she received, her conscience bothered her. Guilt overtook her, and she nearly had a nervous breakdown. What was troubling her? She cheated. She broke the guidelines of the Guinness Book of World Records by getting rides on her support truck from Indiana to New Mexico, a distance of about 1,000 miles. She confessed in an interview, “I shouldn’t be remembered as the first woman to walk around the world; I cheated.” To clear her conscience, she called her sponsor and confessed her deception.

In our text today, Paul informs us that God has given each of us a conscience that declares us guilty when we do wrong, accusing or else excusing us (v.15). In fact, one of the strongest arguments for the existence of God is the human conscience and our awareness of objective moral values: absolute right and wrong. Humans intuitively know that some things such as racism and rape are always wrong. These objective moral values could not emerge on their own. Morality could not have come from material processes like the Big Bang—you cannot get morality from a molecule. And we humans could not have invented absolute moral values on our own—it would be impossible to get every human being to agree on moral standards that would transcend all cultures and politics. God must exist for there to be objective moral values. He knit these moral standards into the fabric of what it means to be human when He created us. Jiminy Cricket says, “Let your conscience be your guide,” but this is only wise if God’s Word is guiding your conscience.

Discuss: How can you tell if your conscience is guiding you in the right direction?

Discuss: Do you think the Moral Law Argument—the idea that God’s existence is the best explanation for the existence of our conscience and objective moral values—is strong evidence for God? Why or why not?

No Third Group

In verse 12, Paul says there are only two groups of people: those who “*have sinned without the Law*” (v.12) and those who “*have sinned under the Law*” (v.12). There is no third group—there is no one who has not sinned!

The first group—those who have sinned without the Law—refers to Gentiles. Even though the Gentiles didn’t have the Law written on stone like the Jews did in the Ten Commandments, Paul asserts that the Law is “*written on their hearts*” (v.15). Their sin is still sin, and they know it. They will be judged by God. The Gentiles will not be excused for their sin just because they didn’t have the Law written down. The Gentiles “*show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them*” (v.15).

The second group—those who have sinned under the Law (v.12)—refers to Jews. The Jewish people had the Law in writing, given to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 20). They will be “*judged by the Law*” (v.12). Jewish people who adhere to the rituals of the Law of Moses will be judged according to the Law of Moses by God.

Whether Jew or Gentile, each person will be judged by the standards of his own knowledge, and the verdict will be the same for all, no matter what standard of good and evil they followed. Paul emphasized in Romans 1:18-20 that God has given every person sufficient knowledge—all will be without excuse.

Discuss: What do you think Paul means by “*the secrets of men*” in v.16?

It’s about Doing, not Just Hearing

Paul’s words in verse 13: “*For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified*” are similar to the words of James 1:22: “*Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*” When we say we have faith but do not show our faith by the action of our lives, we are fooling nobody but ourselves. Some of Paul’s Jewish readers mistakenly thought God would declare them righteous simply because they were Jewish and had heard the Law read aloud since they were children. But hearing without obeying cannot make anyone right with God! In fact, the Law was never meant to save a person from sin—it was meant to teach people and prepare them to accept the Savior (see Hebrews 10:1-10).

Discuss: What are some things people rely on today other than God’s Word to try to make themselves right with God?

Discuss: How would you instruct a new Christian to apply God’s Word to his daily life?

For Further Study:

“Is There an Objective Moral Law?” Frank Turek video at www.apologetics.org

“Do Christians Have to Obey the Old Testament Law?” article at www.carm.org

“I am Jewish, Can I Become a Christian?” article at www.gotquestions.org