

# STUDY NOTES

## A LETTER TO THE ROMANS *at* NEW CITY CHURCH

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The following content is based on the message “Relative Morality and the Law” on 3/5/17 at New City Church in Phoenix, AZ. The following is not meant to be a full synopsis but rather a brief look at the main ideas. To use this Study Guide effectively you must listen to the message found at <http://newcityphx.com/sermons/>.

Leaders using these Study Notes for group study and reflection should read the Biblical text thoroughly before beginning, using this resource as assistance and not relying solely on this material for insight. We encourage all leaders to pray and ask the Spirit for revelation as they lead their respective community groups.

### PRAYER

*Pray and ask God to lead the discussion as everyone gets to share.*

### SCRIPTURE: ROMANS 2:2-29

### JUDGED ACCORDING TO THE LAW

Paul makes it clear that there is going to be a judgment. This means there has to be a standard by which people are judged. Paul refers to this standard as the Law. We know the Law as the first five books of our Bible. In the Law, we can find 613 total commandments: 248 Positive Commandments (do's) and 365 Negative Commandments (do not's).

- *Do you know all 613 commandments? How would you feel about knowing that God will judge according to your knowledge of the Law?*
- *How is legalism exhausting?*

### JUDGED ACCORDING TO OUR OWN LAW

An objection to being judged according to the Law is that not everyone has the Law. Specifically the Gentile believers wouldn't have had the Law. So what about their judgement? Paul also says that the Law is written on our hearts and conscience. This is why we can say that right or wrong come from God!

- *Why don't people want to say that there is absolute truth?*
- *How does believing that all truth is relative actually break down? (For instance, how could someone enter into another culture and say that female genital mutilation is wrong for them to practice if there is no moral standard?)*

It is possible without God, or absolute truth, to believe in moral **feelings** but impossible to believe in moral **obligations**. Romans 2:15 says that obligation comes from God! If there is an absolute moral standard, you have to acknowledge something outside of yourself accounting for it.

**This means that according to the Gospel, people will be judged, and if they don't have the law, it will be their own thoughts/conscience that will accuse them!**

- *Having your conscience as the standard by which God would judge you probably sounds liberating, but how would that actually be enslaving?*
- *Talk about how often you accuse yourself of wrong-doing. How do you judge yourself harshly?*

### LEGALISM LEADS TO HYPOCRISY AND IDOLATRY

In verses 17-24 Paul shows us how law isn't just about action, but your heart—how the law is inward, not just outward. On one hand, if you care only about outward acts, you will ask others to keep the law, but you will break it yourself. That's hypocrisy. On the other hand, if you keep the law its fullest, you will boast in your actions. That's idolatry.

- *We all find ourselves legalistic in some ways. How do you lean toward legalism?*
- *We all find ourselves idolatrous in some ways. How do you lean toward idolatry?*

Paul uses circumcision as an example. It was the sign of being a part of the people of God in the Old Testament. However, if one was circumcised, but didn't follow the Law, what good was it? Or if someone followed the Law, but wasn't circumcised, wouldn't that make them more of a person of God? That's what Paul says.

### CIRCUMCISION THROUGH JESUS

Circumcision was never about the outward act, but about the heart in doing so. Today we still need our heart to be circumcised. This comes through believing in Jesus. Jesus was crucified—and in essence circumcised—bloody, cut off from his relationship from God, even though HE kept the law perfectly. He did this for us.

*“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.”*  
**COLOSSIANS 2:11**

- *We all stand condemned, but what does knowing that Jesus was cut off from the Father for our sin do to your heart?*
- *Pray with each other for God to show you how much you have been forgiven.*