

Romans 2:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law;

Analysis

And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law—γινώσκεις τὸ θέλημα καὶ δοκιμάζεις τὰ διαφέροντα κατηχούμενος ἐκ τοῦ νόμου (ginōskeis to thelēma kai dokimazeis ta diapheronta katēchoumenos ek tou nomou). Γινώσκω (ginōskō, "know") indicates intimate knowledge of God's will through Torah. Δοκιμάζω (dokimazō, "test/approve/discriminate") means critically evaluating to determine what's superior. Τὰ διαφέροντα (ta diapheronta, "the things that differ/excel") could mean distinguishing between options or recognizing what's superior.

Being instructed out of the law—κατηχούμενος ἐκ τοῦ νόμου (katēchoumenos ek tou nomou). Κατηχέω (katēcheō, "instruct/teach") gives us "catechism." Jews received systematic Torah instruction from childhood, learning to distinguish clean/unclean, sacred/profane, ethical/unethical. This was genuine privilege (Romans 3:1-2, 9:4-5), but knowledge without obedience becomes condemnation rather than commendation.

Paul acknowledges legitimate Jewish advantages: knowing God's will through Scripture, ability to discern moral excellence, comprehensive religious education. These aren't fabrications but real benefits of covenant status. However, verses 21-24 will expose the tragedy: possessing truth without living it, teaching righteousness while practicing sin, bearing God's name while blaspheming it through hypocrisy. Knowledge increases accountability (Luke 12:47-48); to whom much is given, much is required.

Historical Context

Jewish education emphasized Torah from childhood. Boys attended synagogue schools learning Hebrew, memorizing Scripture, studying rabbinic interpretation. The Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-9) commanded teaching children diligently. By Jesus's era, Jews prided themselves on superior moral knowledge versus Gentile ignorance. Jesus confronted this in John 5:39-40: searching scriptures while rejecting the One they testified about. Knowledge became end rather than means, fostering pride instead of humility.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. Do I possess knowledge of God's will (biblical literacy) without corresponding obedience, treating theology as intellectual exercise rather than life transformation?
2. How does my ability to 'approve the things that are more excellent' translate into choosing them, or do I merely recognize what's right while doing what's wrong?
3. In what ways does being 'instructed' in Scripture create pride or presumption rather than gratitude and responsibility?

Interlinear Text

καὶ γινώσκεις τὸ θέλημα καὶ δοκιμάζεις τὰ⁶
And knowest his will And approvest G3588
G2532 G1097 G2307 G2532 G1381 G3588

διαφέροντα κατηχούμενος ἐκ τοῦ νόμου
the things that are more excellent being instructed out of the law
G1308 G2727 G1537 G3588 G3551

Additional Cross-References

1 Thessalonians 5:21 (Parallel theme): Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

Deuteronomy 4:8 (Word): And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?

James 4:17 (Parallel theme): Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

Philippians 1:10 (Parallel theme): That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ;

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