

Romans 2:1-11
God's Word to Respectable Sinners

Introduction: Paul switches from the academic discussion of those who may have never heard the Gospel to a deliberate personal message (in a literary style called a diatribe) to the cultured moralistic Jew (cf. 2:17) who would condemn the pagans.

1) God will judge people ACCORDING TO REALITY—2:1-5

- The “therefore” relates to 1:18-19 and God’s wrath
- a) *You have no excuse* (are without legal defense) [avnapolo,ghtoj] (cf. 1:20) before God in this matter—2:1
 - i) He is talking to those characterized by passing judgment [pres. act. ptc. kri,nw] on other sinners while they practice the same sins for which they condemn others.
 - (1) Remember the important distinction between righteous observation / evaluation and sinful condemnation. They are **not** the same.
 - ii) As Francis Schaeffer said, many people will presumptuously say, “I may be a sinner, but at least I’m better than most other people.” Or, “I may be a sinner, but I’m good enough to get by. God wouldn’t condemn me.”
 - (1) People usurp God’s role of judging humanity.
 - (2) People minimize God’s moral standard by emphasizing externals.
 - (3) People underestimate God’s holiness by minimizing their own sin.
 - iii) The differences are simply in frequency, extent, and degree.
- b) You will not escape God’s just judgment—2:2-3
 - i) We know God’s verdict [kri,ma] is in accordance with reality [avlh,qeia].
 - ii) The logic of the first three verses of the chapter may then be set forth as follows: (D. Moo)
 - (1) God’s judgment falls on those who do “these things.”
 - (2) Even the self-righteous judge does “these things.”
 - (3) Therefore: even the self-righteous judge stands under God’s judgment.
- c) You will not repent on your own, even if God temporarily withholds judgment—2:4-5
 - i) *You presume on / underestimate* the significance of [katafrone,w] *the riches* of God’s beneficial *kindness*, self-restraining tolerance, and non-retaliatory patience—2:4
 - (1) God’s purpose in his kindness is not to excuse sin but to stimulate repentance. (D. Moo)
 - ii) *You are storing up* (God’s) *wrath for yourself* because your heart is obstinately hard / stubborn and unrepentant [avmetaho,htoj]—2:5
 - (1) God’s future wrath [ovrgh,] and righteous judgment [dikaiokrisi,a] will be upon **both** Jew and Gentile.
 - (2) The person who knows but resists truth does not go away from the encounter morally neutral. Truth resisted hardens the heart. It makes it all the more difficult to recognize truth the next time around. Life is

not a game without consequences. By our response to God's revelation we are determining our own destiny. (R. Mounce)

- d) Salvation is not by works, but judgment is. (J. Adams)
- e) As soon as a child feels the pang of conscience, struggles against it, and sins, he has acknowledged that there is a meaningful moral law in the universe. As soon as he says, "I ought to do this" but then does the opposite instead, he acknowledges a moral law.

2) God will judge people IMPARTIALLY ACCORDING TO THEIR WORKS—2:6-11

- The focus is on the Law, how God will impartially judge each person.
- a) The theme stated **positively**: God will repay everyone for their works—2:6
 - i) No exceptions, no excuses.
 - ii) Cf. Ps. 62:12; Prov. 24:12; Eccles. 12:14
 - iii) Each day that the self-righteous person persists in his self-righteousness, God adds more guilt to his record. (T. Constable)
- b) Two kinds of people whose accumulations are to be evaluated by God—2:6-10
 - i) On the one hand, there are those ...—2:7, 10
 - (1) What are they like?
 - (a) They persistently do good—2:7
 - (b) They seek to learn about glory, honor, and life that is incorruptible—2:7
 - (c) They persistently do good—2:10
 - (2) What will they receive?
 - (a) God will give them eternal life—2:7
 - (b) God will give them glory, honor, and peace—2:10
 - ii) On the other hand, there are those ...—2:8-9
 - (1) What are they like?
 - (a) They are selfishly ambitious in their imagined rivalries and refuse to obey the truth of the gospel of God—2:8a
 - (b) They obey unrighteousness—2:8b
 - (c) They persistently do evil—2:9
 - (2) What will they receive from God?
 - (a) God will give them both wrath [ovrgh,] and indignation [qumo,j]
 - (b) God will give them tribulation [qliyij] and distress [stenocwri,a]—2:9
- d) The theme restated **negatively**: God will repay everyone without partiality—2:11
 - i) There is no partiality, favoritism, or unfair distinctions with God, not even for those who are the recipients of God's Law.

3) Things we need to remember:

- a) God is shown to be the sovereign, impartial judge of the universe.
 - i) His standard is absolute.
 - ii) His knowledge is perfect.
 - iii) His punishment is just.

- b) While there is essential equality between Jews and Gentiles, the Jews do have a place of prominence in God's program, both in reward and punishment.
 - i) Jews who lack good works will not escape judgment. (T. Schreiner)
- c) A person's habitual conduct, whether good or evil, reveals the condition of his heart. (John Witmer)

Next time: Romans 2:12-16

Romans 2:12-16

God will impartially judge people THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

Introduction: In these verses Paul defends the equality of all people before God's judgment seat against the charge that the Jews' possession of the law gives to them a decisive advantage. (Moo)

1) God shows no partiality to those who possess God's Word—2:12

- This is the first use of "law" in Romans.
- Notice that both groups "have sinned" [a`marta,nw]
- a) **Gentiles:** Even if you **do not** have God's Word [adverb of manner, avno,mwj], you still have disobeyed the essence of its teaching, and will perish eternally [avpo,llumi] apart from God's Word [adverb of manner, avno,mwj].
 - i) The Gentiles were "apart from the law" in the sense that they had no responsibility to obey the commands and ordinances given to Israel through Moses. (Mounce)
 - (1) They are not necessarily lawless but Law-less.
 - ii) Gentiles will not be judged by the standard of the Law of Moses. (Cf. Eph. 2:12)
 - iii) The Jews "knew" that for anyone outside of Israel, i.e. outside the sphere of the Law, salvation was not possible.
 - b) **Jews:** If you **do** have God's Word [evn no,moj], you have disobeyed with your eyes open and will face eternal condemnation [kri,nw] accordingly.
 - i) Israel was "under the law" because they were the recipients of God's revelation through Moses, the great law-giver. (Mounce)
 - ii) Jews will be judged by means of [dia, no,moj] the Law
 - c) So, both groups are guilty before God, but will be judged on a different basis.

2) The explanation of the importance of perfect obedience—2:13

- This is the first use of the verb "justified/recognized by God as righteous" in Romans.
- a) **Negatively:** It is not merely hearing [avkroath,j] God's Word that provides justification.
 - i) The Jews heard the Law read in the synagogue every week.
 - ii) We must not think that because we simply read it, hear it taught and preached, study it, etc., that we are okay before God.
- b) **Positively:** It is perfect obedience [poiht,h,j] to God's Word that was the demand.
 - i) Later the Spirit will tell us through Paul that no one is capable of perfect obedience to the Law. (cf. Rom. 3:20, 23)
 - ii) Cf. Matt. 7:24-27
- c) But if Gentiles are without the law, how can they still be regarded as sinners before God? Paul addresses that question in the next 2 verses.

3) But how can those without God's Word be rightly condemned?—2:14-15

- a) Gentiles do somethings contained in the Law naturally—2:14
 - i) An internal, natural, moral instinct, if you will. Gentiles may be without the Law **externally**, but they are not without law **internally**. This is part of what theologians refer to as General Revelation.
 - ii) They say things like this: 'How'd you like it if anyone did the same to you?' - 'That's my seat, I was there first' - 'Leave him alone, he isn't doing you any harm' - 'Why should you shove in first?' - 'Give me a bit of your orange, I gave you a bit of mine' - 'Come on, you promised.' People say things like that every day, educated people as well as uneducated, and children as well as grown-ups." (C. S. Lewis)
- b) This shows that the Gentile conscience operates on a basic moral standard that overlaps with God's Word—2:15
 - i) The conscience and thoughts of Gentiles are either self-accusing or self-excusing.
 - (1) It implies man's ability to detach himself from himself and to view his character and actions independently. He is thus able to act as a witness for or against himself. (Barrett)
 - ii) This is part of the image of God in man. However, it is neither 100% accurate or trustworthy.
 - iii) You must have your conscience cleansed. (cf. Heb. 9:14)
- c) To sum up, the Gentiles or heathen are sufficiently aware of God's being and His morality (Rom. 1:18-2:15); therefore they are accountable, and thus qualify to be judged. (B. Horner)

4) Christ will judge the public sins and the secrets of the hearts of all people, both Gentile and Jew—2:16

- This judgment will be of both groups (2:12)
 - The "day" refers back to 2:5.
 - But is Jesus qualified to judge all people?
- a) Jesus possesses the authority to judge.
 - i) Delegated to Him by His Father. (Cf. John 5:22, 27)
 - ii) This is a reference to the Great White Throne judgment in Rev. 20:11-15.
 - b) Jesus possesses the ability to judge.
 - i) Jesus knows all **public** sins as well as the **secret** sins of your heart. (cf. Ps. 139:1-4; Jer. 17:10; Rom. 3:6; 1 Cor. 4:5; Heb. 4:13)
 - c) Jesus possesses the inevitability to judge.
 - i) A certain, future judgment by Christ is consistent with the gospel Paul preached. (cf. Acts 17:31)
 - ii) The coming judgment will be according to truth, proportional to the rejection of revelation received, according to deeds done, without partiality, and in response to the **gospel**. (CSB Study)

5) **Things we need to remember:**

- a) People are not held responsible for what they never possessed.
 - i) Or stated positively: each one is judged by the light each one possesses.
- b) Your sin makes you liable to a guilty verdict before God, regardless of how much knowledge of God's Word you may have.
 - i) It is never legitimate to ask: Why am I under the wrath of God? Is God justified in condemning me?
- c) God is the Lawgiver and the Judge of those who violate the law. (cf. Gen. 18:25)
 - i) He will judge according to reality—2:2
 - ii) He will judge the actions and attitudes of people—2:6
 - iii) He will judge impartially, on how people have responded to the truth they had—2:16
- d) The Spirit paints an exceedingly pessimistic portrait of humanity. Christ alone is the solution to their spiritual dilemma.
- e) If we can sit here this morning and not be moved by the serious condition of our unsaved loved ones and acquaintances, we have missed something.

Next time: 2:17-29

Romans 2:17-29
The Guilt of the Hypocritical Jew

Introduction: In this section, Paul is not writing from an observation point **outside of** Judaism. Rather he writes from the **insider** viewpoint of a Jew, and a leader of the Jews at that. He knows the inner workings of Judaism far better than most people of his day. When he condemns their hypocrisy, he condemns his own hypocrisy. Paul shows us how to deal with someone who clings to hope in something they have done (or had done to them) rather than in Christ alone.

1) Who are these hypocritical Jews?—2:17-20 (6 characteristics)

- All of these characteristics are paralleled in Jewish literature of the time.
- a) Five privileges relative to themselves—2:17-18 *But if* (1st class) *you ...* (the “you” of 2:1)
 - i) The first 3 privileges—2:17
 - (1) Superior ethnic status—*call yourself a Jew* (“praise”)
 - (2) Selfish entitlement—*rely/rest on the law*
 - (a) Assume exemption from God’s judgment while depending on Law; see Micah 3:11 (LXX)
 - (3) Fleshly security—*boast in God* (cf. Jer. 9:23-24)
 - ii) Two additional privileges—2:18
 - (1) Knowledgeable ignorance—*know his will*
 - (2) Superior perception—*approve [dokima,zw] what is excellent,*
 - (3) Both of these are based on: *because you are instructed from the law*
- b) Four-fold responsibility relative to others—2:19-20 *And if* (1st class) ...
 - i) *You are sure that you yourself are...*—remain convinced that you have these self-appointed responsibilities to the Gentiles:
 - (1) The first attitude of “I am a necessity”—2:19
 - (a) A **guide to the blind**—a guide to the sightless
 - (b) A **light to those who are in darkness**—light to those without light
 - (2) The second attitude of “I have been taught (2:18)”—2:20
 - (a) An **instructor of the foolish**—a trainer of the ignorant
 - (b) A **teacher of children**—to instruct spiritual toddlers
 - (i) *Having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth*—you have the essentials of knowledge and truth in the Law
 - ii) Barry Horner reminds us: For just as the police officer, a lawyer, and judge have sworn to uphold the law, yet while presenting the posture of a law keeper, they actually break the law! So it is possible for a Bible teacher, a church leader, the amen chorus of the church, to be no less hypocritical than the Jew here described.

2) What is God’s evaluation of these hypocritical Jews?—2:21-24

- God uses the standard they take pride in to condemn them.

- Paul uses rhetorical questions to drive his point home that the privileges mentioned in 2:17-20 are meaningless unless joined with heart obedience. Questions force the hypocrite to think about his guilt.
 - a) Are you not teaching yourself?—2:21-22 (3 examples)
 - i) Do you **steal**? (8th commandment)
 - ii) Do you commit **adultery**? (7th commandment)
 - iii) Do you **rob temples**? (2nd commandment)
 - (1) Consider Acts 19:37—apparently some Jews did steal from the pagan temples (not “churches” as KJV), perhaps by recycling metal idols?
 - b) Are you dishonoring God?—2:23-24
 - i) How? *By breaking* (overstepping) *the law*
 - ii) It is not boasting in the law that brings honor to God but obedience to it. (D. Moo)
 - iii) To bear the name of God is a sacred trust. To violate that trust has severe repercussions. (R. Mounce)
 - c) An honest Jew would have to respond to Paul’s questions by admitting his guilt and his hypocrisy. Paul did not condemn the hypocrisy of the Jews on his own authority; he quotes their own Scriptures from Isaiah 52:5 (LXX).
- 3) **The clarifying and shocking truth concerning circumcision—2:25-29**
- These Jews trusted not only in the Law but also in circumcision.
 - a) Concerning the ineffectiveness of **physical** circumcision—2:25-27
 - i) Regarding **Jews**—vv. 25
 - (1) On the one hand, circumcision is helpful only if you habitually practice the Law.
 - (2) On the other hand, circumcision is made (and remains) uncircumcision if you habitually break the Law.
 - ii) Regarding **Gentiles**—vv. 26-27
 - (1) Habitual obeying and preserving [fula,ssw] the precepts of the law by a Gentile will be regarded as circumcision.
 - (2) Will not an obedient, natural Gentile condemn a law-breaking Jew?
 - b) Concerning the effectiveness of **spiritual** circumcision—vv. 28-29
 - i) Stated **negatively**: a real Jew is not merely an outwardly visible one, nor does circumcision pertain only to what is visible physically. (cf. Jer. 4:4; 9:25-26)
 - ii) Stated **positively**: a real Jew is an inward one, and circumcision pertains to the heart (Dt. 10:16; Col. 2:11)
 - (1) It is in the spirit, not in the literal physical realm, that reveals the reality of one’s relationship with God.
 - (2) His praise (referring to the name “Jew” in 2:17) is from God, not men.
 - c) “These verses [vv. 25-29] must be kept in their context, which is that Paul is dealing with Jews and making a distinction between Jews who believe and Jews who do not believe. He is not teaching that every Gentile Christian is a spiritual Jew. Rather, he is teaching that every Jew is not a full Jew. A

completed Jew is one who has had both circumcisions, the circumcision of the flesh, which is outward in obedience to the Abrahamic covenant, and an inward circumcision of the heart as an act of obedience to the new covenant.”
(Fruchtenbaum)

4) Things we need to remember:

- a) Don't place your faith in an outward possession of God's Word. Rather place your faith in God who gives his Word.
 - i) When the man with the Bible treats it as an external thing only, it causes the man without the Bible to dishonor the God of the Bible. (F. Schaeffer)
 - ii) F. Schaeffer again states: And God is saying to him, “Yes, but look, with all the advantages you have, time after time it can be pointed out that the people without the Bible, the surrounding world that does not believe, live better lives than you do. And therefore you cause the living God to be blasphemed. This doubly condemns you. It doesn't excuse the others, but it doubly condemns you.”
- b) Don't place your faith in an outward sign/rite; rather place your faith in God alone who gives the outward sign/rite.
- c) So, what advantage is it to be Jewish? We will look at that next time in 3:1-8.

Next time: Romans 3:1-8