

## **Romans Study**

### **Session 3 - Romans 2**

Our study tonight continues along the theme of everybody is under the sentence of God's wrath. Last week we saw that Paul was speaking to humanity in general, even though many of the sins listed were predominantly sins not associated in the Jewish culture but rather the Gentiles.

There is a shift in Paul's thought and it's signaled by a subtle clue. He switches using the 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural pronoun (They/them) with the 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular pronoun (you - one person). The question is why, if he's speaking to a church body or calling out a group of people (which is what he's going to be doing) does Paul use a singular pronoun? This is a tool used by ancient authors when making a point. They would write as if they were speaking to an imaginary person who represented the entire group of people the author wanted to discuss. This imaginary person is a Jew and though it isn't spelled out at the front, we'll see by the end of the chapter, that his primary focus in chapter 2 is the Jews and their standing before God. This chapter can be broken into three sections. 1) Jews are just as guilty as the Gentiles before God, 2) The judgment of God is equitable of both Jews and Gentiles and 3) The externals of one's faith are useless before God.

Before reading this chapter, we need to understand some of the ancient world and the mindset of the ancient Jew, especially in their relationship to their faith and to the Gentile world. The easiest way to say this was that the ancient Jews had a real chip on their shoulder concerning matters of faith. It is true that they were God's chosen people. As a result they had several advantages that no other race of people on the planet ever had: the Jews had access to God (though it was sorely limited by today's Spirit-filled Christian faith, it was more than anyone else in the world had at that time), they also had the Law which governed their lives. They also had the external mark of the covenant with God which was circumcision. These things were meant to lead the Jew to living a godly life that was blessed by God so that others could see that blessing and join the faith by coming to trust in the Living God of the Jew. However, that didn't happen very often. Instead, the Jews largely saw themselves as righteous due to their physical, outward traditions and circumcision. Even if they did sin, they rarely phased them as they felt that God's love for them through His covenant relationship to them withstood the power of sin. In other words, they justified their sin, no matter what it was because they thought that being God's chosen people insulated them from the consequences of God's judgment upon them.

Now the logical extension of this self-righteous way to thinking was that the sins of the Gentiles were heinous. While it is true that many of the sins listed in chapter 1 were not prevalent in Jewish society, they were still committed by Jews. Yet, the Jews saw the Gentiles as those who sinned and God's wrath would justifiably fall upon them while they would escape this wrath due to their special relationship with God. Paul spends this entire chapter debunking that notion. His goal is to erode their confidence in that wrong belief so that they will come to realize the power of the gospel. But think about what an uphill climb this is for a Jew. For over a thousand years, they have known that they are God's chosen race. They have convinced themselves that due to God's convenantal promises to them, that they are righteous before God because they possess the law and the sign of the covenant - circumcision.

#### I. The Jews are just as guilty as the Gentiles before God.

A. The self-righteous Jews are just as guilty as the Gentiles. **[Romans 2: 1-5]**

Even though the Gentiles and really all mankind is guilty of suppressing the truth of God which He has revealed through nature, the Jews false presumption of superiority over the Gentiles leads them to be equally without excuse as the Gentiles.

Q: Why is everyone who passes judgment upon another person without excuse before God? (v. 1 - *Because those who judge do the same things - they are also guilty of sin.*)

Q: Who does the judgment of God fall upon? (v.2 - *those who practice sin*)

Paul had been preaching the gospel for about 20 years at this point and all his experience preaching had prepared him for writing chapter 2 concerning the Jews and sin. He saw them as largely self-satisfied.

Q: What were three things Paul accused the Jews of taking for granted? (v.4 - *riches of God's kindness, forbearance and patience.*)

Q: When people forget the kindness, patience and forbearance shown to them by others, what attitudes and characteristics do they develop? (*not good ones - self-satisfied, self-absorbed, bitter, hateful, contempt, etc. The word forbearance means tolerance.*)

The Jews thought that as the chosen people of God, He would overlook their sins. As result they showed contempt for God's goodness to them.

Q: Why does God show kindness to people? (v.4 - *to lead them to repentance*)

This is one of the main verses to fully understand when talking to people about salvation. Many people, especially in our modern culture, are like the Jews in that they are self-satisfied. They feel they don't need anything. Instead of seeing God's mercy and kindness for what it is - an invitation to come to know Him personally by repenting of one's sins - they see it as they are good enough or that God is happy with them so that they fail to seek after God and instead remain in their sins. I have found it actually much harder to witness to a person experiencing the kindness of God rather than the person at the end of their rope.

Q: What is the result of being stubborn toward God? (v. 5 - *they are storing up wrath for themselves*)

This is the problem for not just the Jew but for all people. If you don't repent of your sins, you will face God's wrath. It's that simple.

B. God judges everyone human impartially. **[Romans 2:6-11]**

This section is called a chiasm. It's a way to structure an argument or thought in a very logical manner. When this happens, it makes it really easy to interpret. Here's how it goes:

v.6 - God will judge everyone according to their works

v.7 - People who do good will attain eternal life

- v.8 - People who do evil will suffer wrath
- v.9 - Wrath is for those who do evil.
- v.10 - Glory for those who do good
- v. 11 - God judges impartially

Sometimes the main message is the central two lines but in this case it's the first and last lines that give the main message. God judges everyone impartially.

In v.8 the word "selfishly ambitious" is really just one word in the Greek. It is used only one time prior to Christianity and that is by Aristotle. He used it to describe politicians who seek office for personal gain rather than the public good.

This was a seismic shift in thinking for the Jew (and why Paul had so many Jews out to kill him). In truth through the covenant with Abraham and Moses, the Old Testament Jew truly was supposed to represent the very best of mankind without Christ due to their access to God and the God's Word. Yet, the Law of Moses was not going to protect them from God's judgment. In fact, v.9 presents a major refutation for their self-righteous, callous towards sin attitude - they will be first to be judged by God. As Paul will later explain, they would need the gospel of Jesus Christ just like the Gentiles who they felt a far inferior to themselves. According to this passage, the Jews have no right to think of themselves as in any better situation than anyone else before God.

Q: Is Paul saying that a person's good works can gain their salvation? Why or why not? *(yes and no. Yes, even though Paul does not give any threshold of how many good works are necessary for the salvation of a soul, he does imply that salvation is possible through one's good works, if one could persist in them. However, in reality no - good works cannot save a soul.)*

**[Romans 3:9-10, 20]**

**[Titus 3:3-7]**

**[James 2:10, 4:17]**

No one can be saved on the basis of their own deeds because everyone has broken the law in one way or another. All have sinned and thus we've broken all the law. No one can be saved by doing good. We are all, Jew and Gentile alike, under the judgment of God awaiting His final wrath to come. Our only escape from that wrath is by responding to the gospel, trusting in the righteousness of Christ - not ourselves.

II. There will be equitable judgment upon both the Jews and Gentiles based upon the law.

This section is similar to the last one other than it introduces the Law in specific. Thus Paul is naming the Jews as those he was referring to earlier in vv.1-11. **[Romans 2:12-16]**

There are two words we need to understand for this paragraph: law and instinct. The Law is the Torah, God's law given to Israel through Moses. (90% of the time, when Paul mentions the Law, this is what he means - the other 10% of the time, he means a rule or principle - as in this passage dealing with the Gentiles.) The word "instinct or nature" is the universally

applicable moral standards found not only in the law of Moses but also in nature. It's an unwritten universal moral code of conduct.

Q: What is more important to God: possessing the Law or obeying the Law? (*obedience*)

Q: What does Paul mean by the phrase in v.14 - "a law to themselves"? (*they understand the moral teachings of the Law, despite not having it written down as God's Word and they show that they know it by being carrying out this universal set of moral codes.*)

Israel had the written Word of God, the Law of the Old Testament and through that Law God held them accountable to that Law. However, the Gentiles did not have the written Word of God yet through their consciences, they understood some universal rights and wrongs (again natural revelation at work) and when they acted according to those "laws" upon their hearts, they found they had a clear conscience. The conscience is something that is available to all people. It's something God put within each man. It is our understanding of the highest moral principles we know and understand. For the Gentile, the conscience (given by God) was all they had to go on as far as right and wrong. Thus, when they acted, it was instinctive to them - they understood on an instinctive level that what they were doing was right or wrong. The problem with that is that one's conscience could be defiled or never matured whereas God's Word was explicit and unchanging.

Notice an important point here. The Word of God is the sole source of authority for the life who lives by faith in God. A source of authority is what we gravitate in order to make our decisions about life. It is the place where we turn to get not only guidance but also wisdom for life. From what we are seeing in this passage (and elsewhere if we were to look) the Bible is the only true source of authority we have. God has given His Word to us and nothing else is authoritative for life.

Here's one of the major problems with living in a multi-cultural and multi-religious culture; natural law is hard to define and others hold to different sources of authority. We see things from a distinctly Judeo-Christian mindset. Yet, things we consider right and normal and moral are not always seen that way by those in other religions and cultures.

Q: What is Paul saying about the Jews in this paragraph? (*that they knew the law but didn't keep it and for that reason they will undergo the same judgment by God as the Gentiles*)

Q: Why do you think in v.16 Paul calls the gospel, "my gospel"? (*His gospel is different than the other versions of the gospel being preached by other evangelists of his day. His focused squarely on the finished work of Jesus Christ instead of mixing the faith in Christ with self-works and/or human philosophy and/or Jewish rituals. His gospel doesn't give anyone a pass on judgment based upon their ethnic status or self-righteous works.*)

### III. The external aspects of one's faith are useless before God.

The two most distinguishing aspects of the Jewish faith were the Law and the covenant

sign of their covenant with God which was circumcision. As we'll see, the blessings God gave to the Jews did not in themselves bring rescue from God's judgment. The blessing needed to be coupled with obedience to be effective. **[Romans 2:17-29]**

Q: In vv. 17-24 Paul gives a list of the privileges of the Jews given to them by God. There are nine of them. What are the privileges mentioned by Paul?

- 1) v. 17 - they are called Jew - they have a special identity, name by God
- 2) they rely upon the Law (v.17)
- 3) they can brag about having a relationship with God (v.17-18)
- 4) they know God's will (v. 18)
- 5) they approve of what is superior or essential, they distinguish what really matters from what is unimportant (v.19)
- 6) they are a guide for the blind (v.19)
- 7) they are a light to those in darkness (v.19)

These two mean the same thing. They are in a position to help others understand the truths of God. Look back at the charge given to the nation in **[Isaiah 42:6-7]**.

8) Instruct the foolish. *(The word "foolish" here does not have a bad connotation like it does in Proverbs. It simply means someone who is uninformed or uneducated in a certain matter. Since they don't have full knowledge of God, they easily fall into sin.)*

- 9) they are teachers of immature (infants) - means the same thing as #8.

With all these advantages and blessings, God would expect more from these people. They claim a lot for themselves yet fail to live up to what they say they are.

Next Paul gives a short list of rhetorical questions. All of these are meant to continue to erode the Jewish confidence in their inherited advantages. These questions were intended to reveal the heart of the Jew as no different than the Gentile sinner.

There is only one that needs some explanation and its at the end of the list in v.22. "do you rob temples?" What in the world is that about. In the Old Testament, the Jews were not supposed to re-use metal that had been used to create an idol. That metal was to be destroyed by being burnt. However, the Jews, not wanting to miss out on an opportunity for profit, relaxed this Old Testament regulation so that they could reclaim the metal used in an idol. Thus they could take the idol and melt it down for cash. The Jews claimed to be horrified by the Gentiles use and worship of idols but with this question Paul is accusing them of actually profiting from the practice of idol worship indirectly - by re-using the metal for cash.

Q: What was the result of the Jewish failure to live according to the law given to them in v.23-4? *(they were actually dishonoring the very name of God. )*

Q: How could you paraphrase v.25? *(The Jews walk didn't match their talk)*

Like the Jews of the Old Testament, Christians have been called to be the salt and light of the world. Like those Jews, when we fail to live out our faith, when our walk doesn't match our talk, we dishonor the name of God before the lost. We give reasons for those who don't know

Jesus to continue in their sin rather than showing them the advantages and blessings of the Spirit-filled life in Christ.

Here's another major slap in the face by Paul to the Jews of his day and time. Circumcision, which was the outward sign of the covenant, didn't do any good unless one kept the law. If a person who wasn't circumcised kept the law, he'd actually be a judge of one who was physically circumcised yet didn't keep the law.

Q: What does "circumcision of the heart" mean? *(It means that the old, tough, sinful heart has been replaced with a soft, responsive to God heart. It happens when the Holy Spirit enters a person's life when they are saved.)*

Q: Who is a Jew? (one whose heart has been changed by the gospel)

### **[II Corinthians 3:5-6]**

We have the Word of God given to us, like the Jews of the Old Testament had the Scriptures. The Word of God, when read or heard by the person who has the Holy Spirit indwelling them, that word becomes a renewing influence in our lives. It renews our minds so that Christ can live out His life through us, instead of us living out our fleshly lives in this world. The key is that we learn to obey the Word of God and make adjustments to our lives based on it rather than attempting to bring the Word of God into conformity with our sinful, worldly, dark-minded ways of living.

This radical redefinition of a Jew by Paul will be explained fully in chapters 9-11 but for now, he just drops the bomb on them. His thought is that no one, not even a Jew, can be saved through the Mosaic covenant because no one can keep the law associated with the covenant. The only real people of God are those who, through faith in Christ, have received the Spirit of God.

A discussion that modern Christians need to have is the difference between anti-Semitism and anti-Jewish. Anti-Semitism is an hatred of all Jewish people and their culture. It is a sin. However, anti-Jewish is an acknowledgment that the Jewish faith is not a valid representation of the truth of God. Many years ago the Southern Baptist Convention was meeting in Chicago and as always, they planned a week of outreach and evangelism to the city and its suburbs. For this event they prepared special materials that were intended to reach Jewish people with the gospel. They received a huge firestorm of criticism for this as they were accused of proselyting those in another faith. To their credit, the denomination didn't back down or apologize for their efforts but gave the truth that the Jewish faith was not sufficient for salvation. It was their love for the Jewish people that led them to share the truth. It is our love for all others - anyone - that leads us to testify about the truth of the gospel. It's like what we learned in the Hebrews study: the Jewish faith is now obsolete after the sacrifice and exaltation of Christ.

Q: Do you have any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?