

The Epistle of Paul to the *Romans*

Condemnation: The Need for God's Righteousness (1:18 – 3:20)

Unrighteous Jews (2:1 – 3:8)

Having shown the sinfulness of the immoral pagan ^{Romans 1:18-32}, Paul presented the case against the religious moralist - Jew or Gentile - by listing six principles that govern God's judgement: (1) knowledge ^{v.1}; (2) truth ^{v.2-3}; (3) guilt ^{v.4-5}; (4) works ^{v.6-10}; (5) impartiality ^{v.11-15}; (6) motive ^{v.16}.

2:1-3 You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? In context, Paul seems to be indicating that the 'moral' (self-righteous) people in question here are evaluating the behavior/actions of others and themselves in light of the egregious sins described in the previous section ^{Romans 1:18-32}. However, the people Paul was addressing were underestimating their own sin ^{Luke 18:18-23}, and since they had more knowledge than the previously described wicked pagans, they felt qualified to condemn them, but Paul pointed out that due to these factors, the earthly moral people were condemning themselves ^{Hebrews 10:26-29}. Man's judgement is tainted with self-interest, but the judgement of God is always righteous ^{Psalms 9:4,8}, founded on truth ^{Isaiah 45:19}. The Greek word for judge (*krinō*) used throughout this section refers to condemnation and not to a determination of value. The only being worthy to condemn is Jesus ^{Revelation 4:11, 20:11-15}.

2:4-5 Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance? But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. Paul's question seems to imply that God's "kindness" (common grace ^{Matthew 5:43-45}), "tolerance" (withholding ^{Romans 3:25-26}) and "patience" (longsuffering ^{1 Peter 3:18-20a}) that he extends to all mankind ^{Exodus 34:6, 2 Peter 3:9} do not lead religious moralists to "repentance" ^{2 Corinthians 7:8-11}. In fact, the moral people show "contempt for" (to look down on) God's efforts, because their hearts are "stubborn"

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(*sklērotēs*: hardened) and “unrepentant”, resulting in an accumulation of “God’s wrath”, which they will receive (“will be revealed”) in the End Times ^{Psalm 110:5, Revelation 6:17, 20:11-15}.

2:6-10 God “will give to each person according to what he has done.” To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath & anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. All humans will exist forever, but there are two eternal existences ^{Matthew 25:46}: (1) “eternal life” is a gift ^{Romans 6:23} gained by believing in ^{John 3:16} & following Jesus ^{Mark 1:17-21}, because “the Lord’s unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him” ^{Psalm 32:10, Proverbs 16:20}. The eternal life begins immediately ^{1 John 5:13} upon being “born again” ^{John 3:1-8}, continues in heaven after earthly death ^{John 14:1-3} and ultimately endures in the New Heaven ^{Revelation 21-22}; (2) “second death” is an eternal separation from God ^{2 Thessalonians 1:8-9} in “hell” ^{Matthew 23:13-33} for those who do “not [believe] the truth but have delighted in wickedness” ^{2 Thessalonians 2:9-12}. This existence is not “life” ^{John 3:36}, but the “second death” ^{Revelation 21:8}, which is decreed and carried out by Jesus Christ at the Great White Throne Judgement ^{Revelation 20:11-15}.

Scripture makes clear the basis of salvation: it is provided by grace, not works ^{Ephesians 2:8-9}. However, the Bible is equally clear about the basis of God’s Judgement: it is always based on a person’s deeds ^{Psalm 62:11-12, Jeremiah 17:10, Matthew 16:27, John 5:28-29, 2 Corinthians 5:10, Revelation 20:11-15}.

In these few verses above ^{v.6-10}, Paul writes about two distinct groups: the redeemed ^{v.7,10} and the unredeemed ^{v.8,9}. Works are not the basis, but in spite of the fact that born again people are still imperfect, works (fruit) in their lives will ‘reveal’ the ‘proof’ of salvation ^{James 2:14-26}.

For a discussion of “first for the Jew, then for the Gentile”, see earlier notes ^{Romans 1:16-17}.

2:11-15 For God does not show favoritism. All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing them, now even defending them.)

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God is perfectly just ^{Deuteronomy 32:4} and never shows favoritism ^{Ephesians 6:7-8, 1 Peter 1:17}, which is the act of giving consideration to someone simply because of their popularity, appearance, position, influence or wealth. Judgement will come to all mankind ^{Hebrews 9:27} whether they do not know God's moral law ^{Exodus 20:1-17} (many Gentiles, who do have knowledge ^{Romans 1:18-20}) or do (Jews and some Gentiles, who are held to a higher standard ^{Matthew 11:20-24, Hebrews 6:4-6}). Knowledge of the truths of God are important (necessary), but obedience is required ^{John 14:23}. The Greek word (*syneidēsis*) which is translated "conscience", literally means "to know".

2:16 This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares. Among the "secrets" ^{Jeremiah 17:10, Luke 8:17} Paul referenced here are the motives which produce the works of an individual ^{1 Chronicles 28:9, Psalm 139:1-4, 1 Corinthians 4:5}.

After declaring God's judgement will result in condemnation for outwardly moral people ^{v.1-16}, both Jews and Gentiles, Paul turned his attention exclusively to the Jews. He asserted that neither their Jewish heritage ^{v.17}, nor their knowledge ^{v.17b-24}, nor their circumcision ^{v.25-29} would protect them from the righteous judgement of God.

2:17-24 Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God; if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth – you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? As it is written: "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you." The heritage of the Jews ^{Genesis 12:1-3} (initially called Hebrews or Israelites) became a source of pride and complacency ^{Matthew 3:7-10}. Paul pointed out that the over-confident Jews (thinking they were superior in their standing with God and in their teaching skills) believed they were the best guides for "blind", "foolish", infantile pagans who were in the "dark". During His ministry on earth, Jesus told His disciples: "do everything [the law teachers and the Pharisees] tell you", but "do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach" ^{Matthew 23:1-4}. The Jewish leaders of the time were hypocrites (*hypokritēs*: actors in a play), because "everything they [did was] done for men

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to see" ^{Matthew 23:5}. Paul then asked a series of questions designed to contrast the teachings and the practice of the Jewish leaders (and the Jews in general) ^{Psalms 50:16-20}.

The term "Jew" comes from "Judah" (meaning praise), one of the twelve tribes and the designation of the southern half of Solomon's kingdom after his death. The first use of Jew in the Bible is in the book of Esther ^{Esther 2:5}, following the end of the Babylonian captivity.

Paul's statement concerning "idols" and "[robbing] temples" probably relates to either:

(1) the leaders fraudulently stealing funds from the temple taxes or offerings ^{Malachi 3:8-10} or

(2) the plundering of pagan temples and the selling of stolen idols for profit ^{Deuteronomy 7:25}.

The purpose of Paul's quote ^{v.24} from Isaiah ^{Isaiah 52:5} applies to today just as much as it did to the first century. The compromise and disobedience of God's followers were (and are) an embarrassment to God and His name. Gentiles (non-believers) lack any respect for believers when they observe the hypocritical differences between the believers' principles and actions.

2:25-29 Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. If those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker. A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God. Circumcision was an act of obedience to the law and a reminder of the Israelites' covenant relationship with God (see note below). Though, while circumcision and law knowledge are significant, of more importance is obedience to the law – for both the Jew and the Gentile (i.e., one who is "not circumcised"). However, "a man is a Jew" (spiritual child of God: one who is saved) only if he has received a "circumcision of the heart" ^{Deuteronomy 30:6} by the work of the "Spirit" of Christ ^{Colossians 2:9-14}.

Circumcision was commanded by God to be the physical symbol ("the sign") of God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants ^{Genesis 17:10-11}. God decreed that every male Hebrew baby must be circumcised at the age of 8 days ^{Genesis 17:12-14}. While it has a health benefit of eliminating diseases which could be trapped in the folds of the foreskin, it also symbolized the need for a deep spiritual cleansing to reverse the effects of sin and depravity.