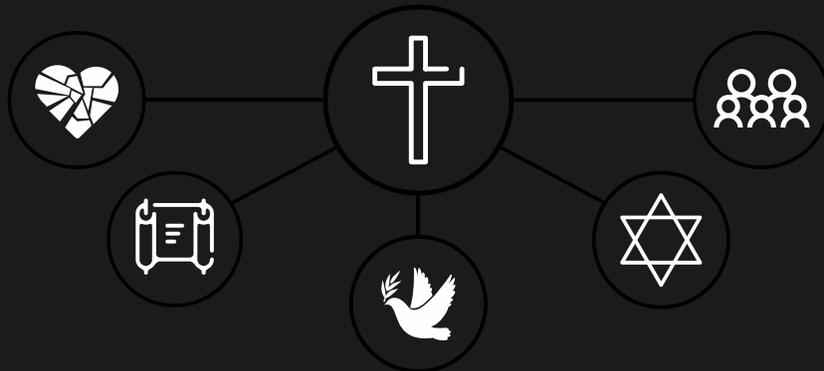




ROMANS AND THE FUTURE GOSPEL

ROMANS 1-7



Title: Romans and the Future Gospel

Text: Romans 2:1-11

Date: October 9, 2022

Main Idea: PAUL PROVES THAT JEWS AND GENTILES STAND UPON THE SAME LEVEL BEFORE THE JUSTICE OF GOD (TAKEN FROM MATTHEW HENRY).

Personal Study Guide

READ ROMANS 2:1-11

Highlight – What stands out?

1. At the end of Romans 1, Paul lists the sins of “them” as he begins this epistle of the future gospel. Chapter 2 begins with “Therefore...”. What is this transition word “there for”?
2. What pronoun does Paul use in Romans 2:1-3. Who is he talking to here?
3. Paul is turning the tables from pointing the finger of judgment to the Gentiles to now showing the Jews they are sinners, as well. What are the Jews guilty of according to Paul in Romans 2:1-11?
4. How does Paul describe God in this passage?

Explain – What does this mean?

It is clear from his introduction that Paul knows his audience well. He anticipates the tension between the “Romans” - the Gentile and the Jewish Christians in Rome - has positioned the Jews to have a “holier than thou” perspective. He knows this because he himself was one of them before he knew personally “the power of God for salvation.”

In order to bring a unified understanding of the true gospel into a lived reality with this church, he has to address their hypocrisy right from the start. A brilliant teacher, he uses an effective technique called “priming” - before new content is taught, the teacher prepares his students, much like a painter does a wall. He begins with what is commonly known and agreed upon - the Law. You can imagine the Jewish Christians listening to the introduction of the letter and saying, “That’s right -

you preach it, Paul! They are such sinners and God is going to get them!” But he immediately changes the direction of that pointing finger and says “...and so are each of you!”

Paul uses several terms repetitively in this part of his letter: a singular form of the pronoun “you” (to emphasize he is speaking to each person as an individual), judgment, and righteousness. As Bruce points out, “He exploits the human tendency toward pride to emphasize that we all face the same impending judgment, thus we all have the same need for reconciliation with God.” No person is in the position to judge another’s sins and no person is sinless. Paul goes for the jugular here: “Do you think you can escape God’s judgment just because you are a Jew and your sin list may not be the same as the Gentiles? You think God will just overlook your sins, but you are wrong. His patience toward each of us is based on His kindness, not our titles or pedigree. Our only valid response to God’s rich tolerance is for each of us to be honest about our sins and repent.”

1. In verses 5-10 Paul describes two paths each of his readers can take toward one undeniable truth evident throughout the Torah (and all of the Old Testament and New Testament) and all creation (1:18): God was, is, and will be The Righteous Judge. Use the table to focus on the 2 paths and what Paul teaches about God’s character and His actions.

Verse	Those who do evil	Those who do good	God

2. Look up some of the following verses to explore more about the Biblical principle of God’s judgment. What did you learn?

- Amos 3:2
- Job 34:11
- Psalm 62:12
- Proverbs 4:12

- Jeremiah 17:10
 - Matthew 16:27
 - 1 Corinthians 3:8
 - 2 Corinthians 5:10
 - Hebrews 4: 6-7
 - Revelation 2:23
 - Revelation 12:12
 - Revelation 22:12
3. God will judge us, but He has not left us to ourselves and our own ability to be righteous. Paul states in six words the greatest hope for each of us and they are found in verse 4. Write the six words out here and then summarize them in your own words.
4. This section of Romans 2 concludes in vs. 11 with six other words that must be believed for there to be a unified understanding of the gospel. What are they?

There are not two standards for sin and judgment - one for the Gentile and another for the Jew. Each of us will be judged by God because each of us are sinners. Each of us can only be made righteous through the kindness of God shown to us in His Son, Jesus Christ. God does not show favoritism when it comes to our response to sin and

His offer of righteousness. He is kind to each of us. He is the Judge for all evil. He can be trusted.

Apply – How does this change me?

1. What is your sin list?
2. Who is someone you have judged? What is sin that you tend to judge as worse than your own?
3. How have you “shown contempt” for the kindness, patience, and tolerance of God in your own life?
4. Can you summarize Paul’s message to those who disapprove of sinners in God’s world?

Respond – What’s my next step?

1. Think back to your sin list. Repent of your sins. Then celebrate the kindness of God to be your righteousness through Jesus.
2. Read the Old Testament book of Joel (3 short chapters) and journal/meditate on what you learn about God’s judgment and God’s blessings. Lead your class

on Sunday to pray for someone to share Joel 2:3 with this week. Pray the same thing for yourself and do it.

3. In response to the kindness of God in your life this week, “build a bridge” with someone that you view as “them” or the “other”. A few ideas - share a few minutes of a genuine conversation by asking questions vs. talking about yourself, pay it forward in line, offer to pray for them by name and actually do it right then.
4. Spend the week writing out and memorizing Titus 3: 4-7.

Commentary: Taken from John Stott’s commentary on Romans

Note to Group Leaders: You also have the F.F. Bruce commentary on Romans that you received on Team Night. If you don’t, please reach out to Courtney Reissig to get your copy.

5. Critical moralizers

2:1-16

Having declared the depraved Gentile world to be guilty and inexcusable (1:20, 32), Paul now passes the same verdict on a person whom he addresses in direct speech: *You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else ...* (2:1). Who is this person? He or she is an imaginary character whom, in the longstanding tradition of the Greek ‘diatribe’, the apostle engages in dialogue. Indeed this individual, together with the category which he or she represents, is in the forefront of Paul’s mind throughout the first sixteen verses of Romans 2.

Many commentators (perhaps most) believe that, having portrayed and condemned Gentile society in 1:18–32, Paul now turns his attention to Jewish people. This is an understandable viewpoint, since the classification of the human race into Jews and Gentiles is mentioned on numerous occasions throughout the letter, and one of the apostle's main purposes in writing is to demonstrate that Jews and Gentiles are equal in sin and equal in salvation. There are two objections, however, to the straightforward identification of Paul's interlocutor at the beginning of Romans 2 as a Jew. First, it is not until verse 17 that he involves a Jew in direct conversation ('Now you, if you call yourself a Jew ...'). Instead, in the earlier verses, although this is obscured by NIV, he twice addresses his partner in the dialogue as 'O man' (1, 3), deliberately emphasizing that he or she is a human being, rather than specifically a Jew or a Gentile.

Secondly, if this section refers exclusively to the Jewish world, then 1:18–32 is the only picture Paul gives us of the ancient Gentile world, in which case it would seem to be an unbalanced one. For not all Gentiles preferred darkness to light, became idolaters, and were abandoned by God to sexually and socially promiscuous behaviour. There were others, as F. F. Bruce has pointed out:

We know that there was another side to the pagan world of the first century than that which Paul has portrayed in the preceding paragraphs. What about a man like Paul's illustrious contemporary Seneca, the Stoic moralist, the tutor of Nero? Seneca might have listened to Paul's indictment and said, 'Yes, that is perfectly true of great masses of mankind, and I concur in the judgment which you pass on them—but there are others, of course, like myself, who deplore these tendencies as much as you do.'

Bruce continues:

Not only did he [sc. Seneca] exalt the great moral virtues; he exposed hypocrisy, he preached the equality of all human beings, he acknowledged the pervasive character of evil ... he practised and inculcated daily self-examination, he ridiculed vulgar idolatry, he assumed the role of a moral guide....

It seems probable, therefore, that Paul has such Gentiles in mind as he dictates verses 1–16. He is evidently thinking of Jews too, however, since he twice uses the expression 'first for the Jew, then for the Gentile' (9, 10). It may even be that the Jews are his 'hidden target' throughout, and that he begins in more general terms only to win their endorsement of his condemnation before turning the tables on them. But his main emphasis is clearly seen in his turning from the world of shameless immorality (1:18–32) to the world of self-conscious moralism. The person he now addresses is not just 'O man' but 'O man who judges' (1, 3), 'O critical, moralizing human being'. He seems to be confronting every human being (Jew or Gentile) who is a moralizer, who presumes to pass moral judgments on other people.

This becomes clearer when we compare the people envisaged in 1:32 and 2:1–3. The similarities are evident. Both groups have a certain knowledge of God as creator (1:20) or judge (1:32; 2:2), and both contradict their knowledge by their behaviour; they 'do such things' as Paul has been describing (1:32; 2:2). What, then, is the difference between them? It is that the first group do things they know to be wrong and *approve*

of others who do them (1:32), which is at least consistent; whereas the second group do what they know to be wrong and *condemn* others who do them, which is hypocritical. The first group disassociate themselves entirely from God's righteous decree, in regard to both themselves and others; whereas the second group deliberately identify themselves with it by setting themselves up as judges, only to find that they are being judged for doing the same things.

The underlying theme of this section, then, is the judgment of God upon self-appointed judges. His judgment is inescapable (1–4), righteous (5–11) and impartial (12–16).

1. God's judgment is inescapable (1–4)

Paul uncovers in these verses a strange human foible, namely our tendency to be critical of everybody except ourselves. We are often as harsh in our judgment of others as we are lenient towards ourselves. We work ourselves up into a state of self-righteous indignation over the disgraceful behaviour of other people, while the very same behaviour seems not nearly so serious when it is ours rather than theirs. We even gain a vicarious satisfaction from condemning in others the very faults we excuse in ourselves. Freud called this moral gymnastic 'projection', but Paul described it centuries before Freud. Similarly, Thomas Hobbes, the seventeenth-century political philosopher, wrote of people who 'are forced to keep themselves in their own favour by observing the imperfections of other men'. This device enables us simultaneously to retain our sins and our self-respect. It is a convenient arrangement, but also both slick and sick.

In addition, Paul argues, we expose ourselves to the judgment of God, and we leave ourselves without either excuse or escape. For if our critical faculties are so well developed that we become experts in our moral evaluation of others, we can hardly plead ignorance of moral issues ourselves. On the contrary, in judging other people, we thereby condemn ourselves, because *we who pass judgment do the same things* (1). *For we know perfectly well that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth* (2). How then can we suppose (we who, though mere human beings, play God and *pass judgment on* others for doing what we do) that *we will escape God's judgment* (3)? This is not a call either to suspend our critical faculties or to renounce all criticism and rebuke of others as illegitimate; it is rather a prohibition of standing in judgment on other people and condemning them (which as human beings we have no right to do), especially when we fail to condemn ourselves. For this is the hypocrisy of the double standard, a high standard for other people and a comfortably low one for ourselves.

Sometimes, in a futile attempt to escape the inescapable, namely *God's judgment*, we take refuge in a theological argument. For theology can be turned to bad uses as well as good. We appeal to God's character, especially to *the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience* (4a). We maintain that he is much too kind and longsuffering to punish anybody, and that we can therefore sin with impunity. We even misapply Scripture to our advantage and quote such statements as, 'The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.' But this kind of manipulative theologizing is to *show contempt* for God, not honour. It is not faith; it is presumption. *For God's kindness leads us towards repentance* (4b). That is its goal. It is intended to give us space in which to repent, not to give us an excuse for sinning.

2. God's judgment is righteous (5–11)

To presume on God's patient kindness, as if its purpose were to encourage licence, not penitence, is a sure sign of *stubbornness* and of an *unrepentant heart* (5a). Such obstinacy can have only one end. It means that we are *storing up* for ourselves not some precious treasure (which is what the verb *thēsaurizō* would normally mean) but the awful experience of divine *wrath on the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed* (5). Far from escaping God's judgment (3), we will bring it all the more surely upon ourselves.

Paul now enlarges on his expression *God's ... righteous judgment* (5b), and begins by stating the inflexible principle on which it is based. The NIV rightly puts this in inverted commas, since it is a quotation from Old Testament Scripture, namely that *God 'will give to each person according to what he has done'* (6). The verse quoted is probably Psalm 62:12, although Proverbs 24:12 says the same thing in the form of a question. It also occurs in the prophecies of Hosea and Jeremiah, and is sometimes elaborated in the vivid expression, 'I will bring down on their own heads what they have done.'⁸ Jesus himself repeated it. So did Paul,¹⁰ and it is a recurring theme in the book of Revelation. It is the principle of exact retribution, which is the foundation of justice.

Some Christians, however, are immediately up in arms. Has the apostle taken leave of his senses? Does he begin by declaring that salvation is by faith alone (e.g. 1:16f.), and then destroy his own gospel by saying that it is by good works after all? No, Paul is not contradicting himself. What he is affirming is that, although justification is indeed by faith, judgment will be according to works. The reason for this is not hard to find. It is that the day of judgment will be a public occasion. Its purpose will be less to determine God's judgment than to announce it and to vindicate it. The divine judgment, which is a process of sifting and separating, is going on secretly all the time, as people range themselves for or against Christ, but on the last day its results will be made public. *The day of God's wrath* will also be the time *when his righteous judgment will be revealed* (5b).

Such a public occasion, on which a public verdict will be given and a public sentence passed, will require public and verifiable evidence to support them. And the only public evidence available will be our works, what we have done and have been seen to do. The presence or absence of saving faith in our hearts will be disclosed by the presence or absence of good works of love in our lives. The apostles Paul and James both teach this same truth, that authentic saving faith invariably issues in good works, and that if it does not, it is bogus, even dead. 'I by my works will show you my faith,' wrote James. 'Faith [works] through love,' echoed Paul.¹³

Verses 7–10 elaborate verse 6, namely the principle that the basis of God's righteous judgment will be what we have done. The alternatives are now presented to us in two carefully constructed parallel sentences, which concern our goal (what we seek), our works (what we do), and our end (where we are going). The two final destinies of humankind are called *eternal life* (7), which Jesus defined in terms of knowing him and knowing the Father, and *wrath and anger* (8), the awful outpouring of God's judgment. And the basis on which this separation is to be made will be a combination of what we seek (our ultimate goal in life) and what we do (our actions in the service either of ourselves or of others). It is very similar to the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, in which he delineated the alternative human ambitions (seeking our

material welfare or seeking God's kingdom), and the alternative human activities (practising or not practising his teaching).¹⁶

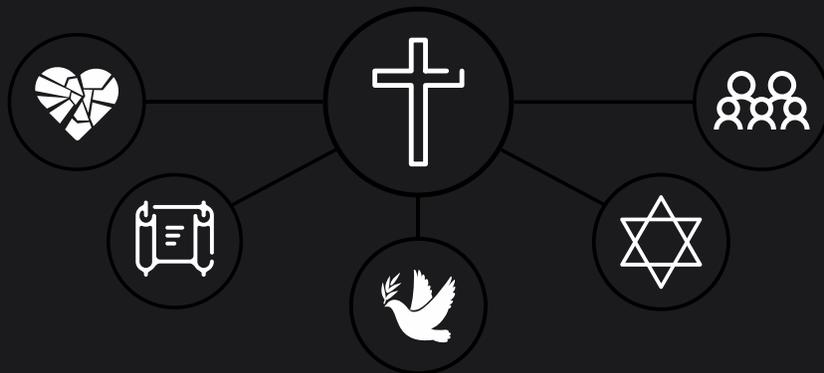
Returning to Paul, on the one hand there are those who seek *glory* (the manifestation of God himself), *honour* (God's approval) and *immortality* (the unfading joy of his presence), and moreover who seek these God-centred blessings *by persistence in doing good* (7). That is, they persevere in the way, for perseverance is the hallmark of genuine believers. On the other hand there are those who are characterized by the single derogatory epithet *self-seeking* (8a). *Eritheia* was used by Aristotle of 'a self-seeking pursuit of political office by unfair means', and so here probably means 'selfishness, selfish ambition' (BAGD). Further, those who are infatuated with themselves, and engrossed in self-centred goals, inevitably *reject the truth and follow evil* (8b). Indeed, they 'suppress the truth by their wickedness' (1:18). Both these expressions blame the repudiation of truth on *adikia*, 'evil' or 'wickedness'. To sum up, those who seek God and persevere in goodness will receive eternal life, while those who are self-seeking and follow evil will experience God's wrath.

In verses 9–10 Paul restates the same solemn alternatives, with three differences. First, he simplifies the two categories of people into *every human being who does evil* (9) and *everyone who does good* (10). Jesus made exactly the same division between 'those who have done evil' and 'those who have done good'. Secondly, Paul elaborates the two destinies. He describes the one as *trouble and distress* (9), emphasizing its anguish, and the other as *glory, honour and peace* (10a), taking up the 'glory' and 'honour' of verse 7 which form part of the goal believers seek, and adding 'peace', that comprehensive word for reconciled relationships with God and with each other. Thirdly, Paul adds to both sentences, *first for the Jew, then for the Gentile* (9–10), affirming the priority of the Jew alike in judgment and in salvation, and thus declaring the absolute impartiality of God: *For God does not show favouritism* (11).¹

¹ John R. W. Stott, [*The Message of Romans: God's Good News for the World*](#), The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 80–85.

ROMANS AND THE FUTURE GOSPEL

ROMANS 1-7



Group Study Guide

*This lesson is for the Group Leader to use to teach the lesson and facilitate the discussion. It is not intended that you will use every question in this guide during your group time. You will likely only be able to cover 4-5 questions, depending on how discussion goes. This guide is longer than what you will need but provides the freedom and flexibility to pull questions out for discussion that will best serve your group time.

Tip: You may want to pull one question from each section for discussion or spend more time on a particular section than another on. It's totally up to your discretion.

Introduction

Icebreaker Question:

Has there been a time that you felt judged by another person?

OR

Has there been a time when you were a favorite or someone showed partiality to you?

Group Study Guide

READ ROMANS 2:1-11

Highlight – What stands out?

1. Remember when Paul sent this letter it was not divided with chapters and verses, so it flowed like a typical letter. At the end of Romans 1, Paul lists the sins of “them” as he begins this epistle of the future gospel. Ch. 2 begins with “Therefore...”. What is this transition word ‘there for’?
2. What pronoun does Paul use in Romans 2: 1-3. Who is he talking to here?
3. Paul is turning the tables from pointing the finger of judgment to the Gentiles to now showing the Jews they are sinners, as well. What are the Jews guilty of according to Paul in Romans 2:1-11?
4. How does Paul describe God in this passage?

Explain – What does this mean?

Break into smaller groups of 2-3. Share that Paul has turned the tables from the sins of “them” (the Gentiles) to now focus on the sins of “you” (the Jews). **Have the small groups read verses 1-3 and discuss what Paul says about the Jews. Ask the groups to discuss if they believe these verses relate to Christians today, and if so how.**

Share that verse 4 is a pivotal Biblical principle that contrasts many people’s views of God. **Read vs. 4 and ask groups to restate this in their own words. Discuss what it means that God’s kindness leads us to repentance.**

Note to Leaders: It might be helpful to summarize from the Personal Study the Explain content as relevant or appropriate for your group.

1. In verses 5-10 Paul describes two paths each of his readers can take toward one undeniable truth evident throughout the Torah (and all of the Old Testament and New Testament) and all creation (1:18): God was, is, and will be The Righteous Judge. **Break the class into 3 groups and give each group one of the columns.** Use the table to focus on the 2 paths and what Paul teaches about God’s character and His actions.

Verse	Those who do evil	Those who do good	God

2. Write a few of these verses on the white board and have individuals look them up or break into small groups of 2-3 and assign each group a few verses each to explore more about the Biblical principle of God’s judgment:

- Amos 3:2
- Job 34:11
- Psalm 62:12
- Proverbs 4:12
- Jeremiah, 17:10
- Matthew 16:27
- 1 Corinthians 3:8
- 2 Corinthians 5:10
- Hebrews 4: 6-7
- Revelation 2:23
- Revelation 12:12
- Revelation 22:12

3. God will judge us, but He has not left us to ourselves and our own ability to be righteous. Paul states in six words the greatest hope for each of us and they are found in verse 4. Write the six words on the white board and ask individuals to summarize these into their own words.

4. This section of Romans 2 concludes in vs. 11 with six other words that must be believed for there to be an unified understanding of the gospel. What are they? Write these on the board and discuss what it means that God does not show partiality.

There are not two standards for sin and judgment - one for the Gentile and another for the Jew. Each of us will be judged by God because each of us are sinners. Each of us can only be made righteous through the kindness of God. God does not show favoritism when it comes to our response to sin and His offer of righteousness. He is kind to each of us. He is the Judge for all evil. He can be trusted.

Apply – How does this change me?

1. **Note to Group Leaders:** This question might be hard for people to answer in a group setting, but if people feel comfortable sharing, what is your sin list?
2. Who is someone you have judged? (No need to share names, just sins that you judge more than others)
3. How have you “shown contempt” for the kindness, patience, and tolerance of God in your own life?

Respond – What’s my next step?

1. Repent of your sins. Then celebrate the kindness of God to be your righteousness through Jesus.
2. Encourage your Group to read the Old Testament book of Joel (3 short chapters) and journal/meditate on what you learn about God’s judgment and God’s blessings. As a Group leader, share what you learned from Joel this week.
3. In response to the kindness of God in your life this week, “build a bridge” with someone that you view as “them” or the “other”. A few ideas - share a few minutes of a genuine conversation by asking questions vs. talking about yourself, pay it forward in line, offer to pray for them by name and actually do it right then.

Additional Resources:

Podcast: [Knowing Faith on Romans 2](#)

Song: [Psalm 90 by Shane and Shane](#)