

Even the 'Religious' Need the Gospel, Part 1¹

Romans 2:1-16

Call: Isa 55:1-3, 6 (NIV)

Scripture: Jeremy reciting Romans chapter 1 (10 minutes)

I. Introduction

A. Introduction

Thank-you Jeremy, and Good morning! After a few months off, we enter back into Romans this morning, a study I'm calling *The Gospel For All Seasons*. Except for two weeks this fall, we will soak in Romans until Thanksgiving.

B. Review

Let's review a bit. Those first seventeen verses which Jeremy just recited, are an introduction to Romans, and bring out many great themes of the book. In particular, Paul turns our attention repeatedly to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Some of the key points he makes are:

- The Gospel is from God. It's not a human invention. God thought it up, planned it out, set it in motion and will complete it.
- The Gospel is centered in and on Jesus Christ. The Gospel is all about Jesus and His event, the entirety of the Jesus event, and the implications of His event.
- The Gospel includes a people, the Gospelized. The Holy Spirit causes the Gospel to come alive in a people who move out into the world to be salt and light in a world that desperately needs it.
- The Gospel is the dynamite of God that breaks through hard human hearts, bringing salvation to all who believe.
- And, lastly, the Gospel reveals the righteousness of God, that is to say, the character of God, and God's way of righting all wrongs.

Now, for all of these reasons and many more, Paul is eager to get to Rome to preach the Gospel. He's not ashamed of the Gospel. Many people think verses 16-17 are the thesis statement of the entire book. Paul is *"not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes"* (Rom 1:16-17).

So, those first 17 verses of introductory material contain a lot of good news. But, beginning in verse 18, which begins the body of the letter, Paul launches into lots of bad news. Why? Because Paul wants to show why everyone needs the Gospel.

So, he will spend 2 chapters showing that we're all in the same boat. We are all infected with this thing called sin. No one likes to talk about sin anymore, yet we're all infected with it. Ever

¹ Taken from Tim Keller, *Romans 1-7 For You* (New York: Good Books, 2014), 53.

since the garden, when Adam and Eve ate the fruit, the virus of sin entered into the system of humanity, infecting all people.

C. Looking Forward

So, for these 2 chapters, Paul is describing the universal brokenness of all humanity, and the universal need for the Gospel. I need the Gospel. You need the Gospel. We all need the Gospel. In this section of Romans, we are looking at sin straight in the face, even our own personal sin.

So, we pick up today in the midst of the bad news. Paul has explained the Gentile predicament at the end of chapter 1, sins that were mostly associated with the idolatrous Gentile world. He now moves to judgmental religious people, probably pointing at the Jews, to show that even the Religious need the Gospel. So, I invite you into our text today, beginning in Romans 2, verse 1.

II. The Judgmental Religious Person (v 1-5)

1 You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. 2 Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. 3 So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? 4 Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance? 5 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.
(NIV)

A. Introduction

So, those last verses of chapter 1 ended with a long list of sins resulting from idolatry, serving something or someone other than God. There were some 20 sins named, from wickedness, evil, greed and depravity to no fidelity, no love and no mercy. And, not only that, but those who *do* these things also encourage and approve of others *doing* them. *Do* is the key theme there. And, beginning in chapter 2, we get those who disapprove of doing those things, yet still *do* them.

What we *do* matters to Paul, because it matters to God. God has called his image-bearers not “just to know about the good or to talk about [the good], but to *do* [the good]” (Achte-meirer, 25). So, at the end of chapter 1, Paul painted a sad picture of all kinds of *doing* that entirely disintegrates relationships and society.

And, now in chapter two, Paul begins by using a familiar rhetorical strategy called a diatribe. A diatribe does not mean a rebuke or an attack as we might think of it today. In Paul's time, it was a method of learned discussion, a creative mode of instruction and exhortation. It typically involved an imaginary conversation partner, called an interlocutor, who represented and

expressed actual questions or opposing points of view. The real speaker then refutes the imaginary interlocutor's argument, leading to more instruction and exhortation. The power of the diatribe is that it draws us in, allowing us to be addressed personally either through the person questioned or through the respondent.

So here, the diatribe takes shape by Paul referring to a "you" that is singular. It's jarring language from how Paul finished chapter 1, which was all third person plural. And it draws us in as if Paul is speaking to each one of us. "You." Paul is imagining a religious person of God who has put his/herself in a superior place over all those bad Gentiles from chapter 1. This person has just listened to that list of chapter 1 sins and said, "Hey wait a minute, I'm not like that. I'm not wicked. I'm not evil. I'm not greedy. And, by the way, I go to church every Sunday, and I'm part of God's chosen people." They've excused themselves from God's judgment and Paul will not have any of it!

B. Amos

It's a lot like the book of Amos. Our men just finished studying Amos in the spring. Amos is the doom and gloom prophet. And, he's writing to the Israelites, God's chosen people, in the 8th century BC. And the first two chapters are devoted to God pronouncing judgment on the nations around Israel. So, the picture is of Amos standing in front of a large group of really religious Israelites giving his sermon. And, he points to each nation outside of Israel and rebukes their sin. And, as he moves to each nation, you can imagine the Israelites right in front of him cheering. "Judgment on Edom – Yeah! Ammon – Yeah! Moab – Yeah! They're getting what they deserve! Yeah!" Then, as everyone's cheering, Amos points directly at the Israelites and says, you're in the same boat. You're just as sinful as all those nations!

Paul says, yes, I just rebuked the Gentiles because of their sin, but you, religious Jews, are just as sinful.

C. Hypocrites All

In these verses, Paul reveals what I think is a tendency for all of us in our sinfulness, the tendency to be critical of everyone else except ourselves, the tendency toward self-righteousness, the tendency to sit in judgement over others. The sin in ourselves is never serious, but it's super serious in other people.

Mother Theresa once said, "If you judge others, you have no time to love them" (Smith, 189).

Of course Jesus commanded us very clearly, "*Do not judge, or you too will be judged,*" Matt 7:1. According to Jesus, we are not to judge others, meaning not condemn others, because we don't have all the facts. We are not God, so we cannot stand over another person in judgment.

Paul points out another reason to not judge others. Because we end up doing the very same things we tell others not to do. In other words, we're hypocrites.

- We tell our children to be patient, and yet we repeatedly lose our temper.
- We tell others not to speed, and yet we repeatedly speed ourselves.

- We tell others to go to church and read their Bibles, then we skip church and lose our Bibles.

And, of course we justify all of it. We're adults, our children are not. We speed b/c we really do have a crisis. Or, we have really busy jobs and don't have time to go to church and read our Bibles.

Should I keep going? Because I can. I'm guilty of all of it.

In fact, I was talking to my wife the other day about doing a devotional with some athletes on character, that it matters more how you play the game, than whether you win. She looked at me and started laughing and said, "You are not the one to teach on that topic!"

The bottom line is I'm a hypocrite. And, Paul's point here is that we are all hypocrites, even all those who are religious. Even those who grow up in a Christian home and go to church every Sunday. We pass judgment, and then do the same exact things. And why?

D. Why?

Because we seem to think that the judgment of God somehow doesn't apply to us, that we will "*escape His judgment*," verse 3. His judgment applies to everyone else, but not to me. We think we're the exception.

E. Confusion

Then Paul says, we begin to confuse God's patience and kindness with indifference.

And, yes, God is very patient and very kind. The parable of the prodigal son tells us how patient and kind He really is. The prodigal son finally comes home, and the Father welcomes him with open arms.

God does not immediately judge acts of sin. He takes his hands off and waits patiently, in hopes of repentance. As Peter says, "*The Lord ... is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance*" (2 Pet 3:9). But, we end up leaning so much on his patience and kindness, we begin to think God is simply *a sweet-smiling cosmic guru, sitting in a bed of delicate roses, freely dispensing daisies in a stupor, oblivious to our sin and its ruin upon the world*. So, we keep on doing what's right in our own eyes.

F. A Hard heart

In reality, this lifestyle reveals a hard heart. Paul calls it a "*stubborn and unrepentant heart*," verse 5. And, this kind of heart stores up wrath against us in the day of judgment. God, the righteous judge, will judge rightly on the final day of judgment.

These are sobering words from Paul as we stare straight at our sin.

G. Soft Hearts?

What strikes me is that hypocrisy and self-righteousness are as serious as any of those sins from chapter 1. We may not think of hypocrisy as being as bad as envy or murder or deceit or malice, but Paul is putting it right there in the list, all stemming from a hard heart. As Michael Gorman says, “A hard heart is a standard part of the hypocrite’s anatomy” (Gorman, 96).

So, what do we do? For one, it seems we need to make confession a regular discipline. But, we also need soft hearts. So, how do we soften our heart?

Well, we start by praying unceasingly that the Spirit would keep our hearts soft. Way back in Ezekiel, God promised to remove the heart of stone and replace it with a soft heart, a heart of flesh (Ezek 11:19-20). This is the New Covenant that Jesus brings.

Today, when we come to Jesus, the Spirit takes up residence in our lives, and He works at softening our hearts. When we cooperate with Him and follow His leading in trust and obedience, our hearts remain soft. And, we begin to live in right relationships with others, looking at them not with judgmental eyes, but with grace-filled eyes. We begin to approach others with the same grace that was shown to us, as we walk in step with the Spirit. *Amazing grace, how sweet the sound.*

For the rest of our text today, Paul now turns to God’s judgment. God’s patience is not permanent. There will be a judgment day where He will judge *all* people, not just overtly terrible people. Verse 6.

III. The Impartial Judgment By God (v 6-11)

6 God “will repay each person according to what they have done.” 7 To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. 8 But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. 9 There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; 10 but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. 11 For God does not show favoritism. (NIV)

A. Introduction

Now in these verses, Paul’s argument can be difficult to follow. It might appear that he’s teaching a doctrine of salvation by works. But, he’s not. Paul’s overarching argument will be more of a condemnation by works because, as he will say in chapter 3, all humans have sinned *in their works*, and fallen short of the glory of God.

I think it’s helpful to remember that the two most important points in these verses are:

1. That sin leads to God’s judgment and
2. That God judges all people impartially.

That’s what we want to remember as we walk through the rest of chapter 2.

B. God’s Impartiality

Paul begins by quoting a verse that's in several places in the Old Testament, that God *"repays each person according to what they have done"* (Ps 28:4; 62:12; Prov 24:12). Jesus also alludes to this verse in several places (Matt 3:7-10; 16:27; 25:31-46).

C. Fruit

The fact is that the only evidence of genuine faith in Jesus is what we do, whether we are bearing fruit or not (to use Jesus' words). In Scripture, faith is never separated from behavior. That is to say that faith is never simply intellectual assent. It always includes behavior.

In chapter 1, Paul already shared about his desire to call everyone to the *"obedience that comes from our faith"* (Rom 1:5). I said it then, and I'll keep saying it. Romans is not just about the justification of faith, it's also about doing faith, the obedience that springs from a loving, trusting relationship in Jesus. Paul is very much concerned about how we live.

And, so is Jesus. The conclusion of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is all about what we do, in fact the key word in his conclusion to the most important sermon in history is "do." Remember the conclusion? 21 *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven... 24* *"Everyone ... who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock... 26 everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.*

And, we all know what happened to each one. The one on sand crashed when the storms came. The one on rock stood through the storm. According to Jesus and Paul, I am not a disciple unless I obey. I may be an admirer of Jesus or a fan of Jesus, but I am not a disciple of Jesus until or unless I obey.

The fact is there are only two kinds of people in the world, those who are attached to Jesus and those who are not. Those who see Jesus' words as wisdom for life and those who do not. Those who are persistent in doing good according to Jesus, and, verse 8, *"those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil"* (2:8).

CS Lewis put it this way:

"People often think of Christian morality as a kind of bargain, in which God says that if you keep a lot of rules I will reward you, and if you don't, I will do the other thing. I don't think that is the best way of looking at it. I would much rather say that every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part that chooses, into something different than it was before. And, taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices all your life long, you are slowly turning this central thing either into a heavenly creature or into a hellish creature; either a creature that is in harmony with God, and with other creatures and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war with God and his fellow creatures and with himself. To be the one kind of creature is heavenly, that is joy and peace and knowledge and power; to be the other means madness, horror, rage, impotence and eternal loneliness. Each of us at each moment is progressing to the one state or the other" (Lewis, 86).

D. God's impartiality

Only two kinds of people, and, in the end, God will judge all and judge all impartially. He will not be fooled. There is no favoritism with God.

Verse 12.

IV. The Final Judgment (12-16)

12 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. 13 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. 14 (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. 15 They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.) 16 This will take place on the day when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares. (NIV)

A. Introduction

Paul now turns even more directly to the religious Jews who have the law. Paul seems to think that just telling the Jews that they're sinful is not enough. He must make sure they know that just because they possess the Old Testament law, which was a great gift, does not give them an advantage on judgment day. They need Jesus, not the law!

His main point continues to be God's impartiality in judgment, even for those who have the Old Testament law.

B. God's Judgment

God is an impartial judge, and His judgment will be according to the truth that we each know. God gave the law and his special revelation to the Jews. The Jews had the truth, and they will be held responsible for that revelation.

But, the Gentiles have a law too, even though they don't have the Old Testament law. Being made in the image of God means the Gentiles have an internal essence of the law, they have a conscience, and they can engage in moral reasoning.

C. Conscience

So, what about the conscience? Paul will use this word several times throughout Romans. The conscience is an internal moral compass, or alarm system, that points people to a manner of life recognized as right by both God and people. And, it keeps nagging us when something is wrong, like that little light on the dashboard that lights up when the oil needs to be changed. Every time we turn on the car, we see it and it tells us something is wrong. That's the conscience.

Yet, Paul is also very clear in his writings that the conscience is not infallible (1 Cor 8:7, 8, 12; 1 Tim 4:2; 1 Cor 10:29). Sin has also damaged its function. Therefore, the conscience needs to be trained to submit to a higher authority, to God through Jesus. Hebrews 9, which Bernard will get to next year, tells us that it is through the blood of Jesus that our conscience can be purified and cleansed. This is our great hope (Heb 9:14).

D. The Gentiles

So, what Paul is saying is that the Gentiles have a conscience that guides them. And, that conscience will cause them to do the law occasionally, but also break the law occasionally. That's no different than the Jew who has the Old Testament Law and does the law sometimes but also breaks it sometimes. Therefore the Jew has no advantage on judgment day.

E. Same Boat

The result is that everyone is in the same boat. Or as I said last May, we are all outside the boat needing to be rescued, whether we are a religious person or an unreligious person with only our conscience to guide us. We are all in need of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

F. Judgment Day

Paul concludes this section by going back to the theme of final judgment. According to verse 16, a day is coming when God will judge all *"people's secrets"* (2:16). God knows our secrets. And, He will judge everyone.

V. Conclusion

And so, *"now is the day of salvation"* (2 Cor 6:2). *"Seek the Lord now while He may be found,"* as we read in our Call to Worship today. The choice is ours today. Judgement day will be too late. Piercing words from Paul.

But, also hear this good news today. God does know about all the garbage in our lives. He knows all of our judgmentalism and envy and greed and lust and gossips. He knows our lack of love and lack of compassion and lack of fidelity. He knows our hypocrisy. He knows all our idolatry. He knows my secrets, and He knows your secrets. He knows it all, and He still loves us. He still loves me. He still loves you. In fact, He knew all of our garbage before He called us. Paul even says in chapter 5 that even when He knew all of our garbage, *"He [Christ] died for us"* (Rom 5:8). So, we can simply come to Him and say with the tax collector in Luke, *"God, give mercy. Forgive me, a sinner"* (Luke 18:13, MSG).

VI. Confession & Assurance

A. Introduction

At this time, I'd like to do that very thing. Let's have a time of silent confession. These texts in Romans point out that we're all sinful and broken before God. So, let's be silent for a moment and confess our brokenness to God, then we'll read a confession together.

B. Confession

Merciful God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid, we confess that we have sinned against you and against one another. Let's read this confession together:

- We confess that we name the name of Christ, but we do not make his presence real in our lives. **O Lord Forgive Us**
- We confess that we pay lip service to your grace, but we refuse to offer it to others. **O Lord Forgive Us**
- We confess that we claim to live by faith, but we secretly want to have our own way. **O Lord Forgive Us**
- We confess that we want to be free, but we avoid the discipline that would set us free. **O Lord Forgive Us**
- We confess that we lay claim to your promises in our need, but we feel no compassion for the needs of others. **O Lord Forgive Us**

Forgive us and cleanse us, we pray, and give us new life through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

<Silence kept for 20 seconds>

C. Assurance of Forgiveness

And, now, let's say together the gracious promise of God's forgiveness in 1 John 1:9:
If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Amen.

Benediction

"May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word" this week (2 Thess 2:16-17).

Resources

Achtemeier, Paul, *Romans: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*
Bird, Michael, *Romans (The Story of God Bible Commentary Book 6)*
Gorman, Michael J, *Romans: A Theological and Pastoral Commentary*
Keller, Tim, *Romans 1-7 For You*
Lewis, C.S., *Mere Christianity*
Smith, James Bryan, *The Good and Beautiful Life*
Stott, John, *Romans: God's Good News for the World*
Thielman, Frank, *Romans (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the NT)*