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# Romans: Gospel People

Midweek Bible Study

Week 4 - Romans 2:1-16: God's just judgment

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## 2:1 - You, therefore...

'You' - gk. *ei ô anthrōpe* - you are, O man

You is singular, 'O man' is part of the diatribe Paul sets up - as if he is addressing a third party figure and we are listening in.

'Therefore' of verse 1 makes sense in context of argument from 1:18...

"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven *against all the godlessness and wickedness of people*, who suppress the truth by their wickedness" (Romans 1:18, NIV)

...

"*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." (Romans 2:1, NIV)

## 2:1-3

Summary by Douglas Moo:

God's judgment falls on those who do "these things"

Even the self-righteous judge does "these things"

Therefore: even the self-righteous judge stands under God's judgment.

"For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." (Matthew 7:2, NIV)

## 2:4 - God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance

Kindness - gk. *chrēstotētos* - also goodness

Other instances:

"Consider therefore the **kindness** and sternness of God" (Romans 11:22a, NIV)

"in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his **kindness** to us in Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 2:7, NIV)

"But when the **kindness** and love of God our Saviour appeared" (Titus 3:4, NIV)

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## A Jewish understanding of repentance

*Gates of Repentance*, a standard work of Jewish ethics written by Rabbenu Yonah of Gerona, a sinner repents by:

- regretting/acknowledging the sin;
- forsaking the sin (see below);
- worrying about the future consequences of the sin;
- acting and speaking with humility;
- acting in a way opposite to that of the sin (for example, for the sin of lying, one should speak the truth);
- understanding the magnitude of the sin;
- refraining from lesser sins for the purpose of safeguarding oneself against committing greater sins;
- confessing the sin;
- praying for atonement;
- correcting the sin however possible (for example, if one stole an object, the stolen item must be returned; or, if one slanders another, the slanderer must ask the injured party for forgiveness);
- pursuing works of *chesed* and truth;
- remembering the sin for the rest of one's life;
- refraining from committing the same sin if the opportunity presents itself again;
- teaching others not to sin.

(This is a later work, not contemporary to Paul but the understanding in Paul's day was probably similar)

2:5

"storing up" - gk. *thēsauroizeis* - also treasuring (usually with reference to good things, see below)

"But **store up** for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal." (Matthew 6:20, NIV)

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## 2:6 - God "will repay each person according to what they have done."

Paul seems to be quoting Proverbs 24:12

If you say, "But we knew nothing about this,"

does not he who weighs the heart perceive it?

Does not he who guards your life know it?

**Will he not repay everyone according to what they have done?**

(Proverbs 24:12, NIV)

Also present in New Testament teaching elsewhere:

"For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and **then he will reward each person according to what they have done.**" (Matthew 16:27)

"It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve." (2 Corinthians 11:15)

## 2:6-11

### Structure

A. God will judge everyone fairly	v.6
B. Those who do good will attain eternal life	v. 7
C. Those who do evil will suffer wrath	v.8
C'. Wrath for those who do evil	v.9
B'. Glory for those who do good	v.10
A'. God judges impartially	v.11

## 2:7

by persistence - gk. *hypomonēn* - endurance, patient fortitude, perseverance

## 2:8

self-seeking - gk. *ex eritheas* - [live] out of selfishness, out of self-interest

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## 2:7, 10

Who are “those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honour and immortality”?

Some possibilities (not all of them sound theology!)...

- (1) Quite popular in the patristic period [early church] was the identification of these people with *faithful Jews* and “*moral*” *Gentiles* before the coming of Christ.  
[Chrysostom]
- (2) Many commentators have argued that Paul is referring to any *non-Christian* but within this there are certain stipulations and different approaches:
  - (a) Some think Paul sets out as a possibility the salvation of some people through their works apart from faith in Christ one that this principle stands in irreconcilable tension with his teaching of justification by faith alone.
  - (b) Others argue, similarly, the God rewards with eternal life those who respond obediently to “the light they have received” and that as long as the works are regarded as produced with the aid of God’s grace no contradiction with Paul’s teaching elsewhere is created. [Augustine]
  - (c) Another variation holds that those who earnestly seek eternal peace are granted the faith that brings justification and that this faith - the missing term in Romans 2 - is what brings eternal life.
  - (d) A few have viewed the principle as purely hypothetical, a statement of the way things would be if Christ had not come and the law could be fulfilled.
  - (e) Finally, others argue that the promise of eternal life for those who do good is fully valid, but that the power of sin prevents anyone from doing that good to the degree necessary to merit salvation. Verses 7 and 10 set out the condition, apart from Christ, for salvation; Paul’s subsequent argument shows that no one is able to fulfil those conditions. [Romans 3:23]
- (3) Many think Paul is thinking in these verses specifically of Christians. They, and only they, are those who, through union with Christ, are able to produce works acceptable to God in the judgment.

### Judgment by works

Helpful verses: 1 Corinthians 3:10-14; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Galatians 5:6,21; Ephesians 5:5; James 2:14-26; Hebrews 12:14; Matthew 7:24-27; Matthew 12:37; 25:31-46; Luke 10:25-28

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Douglas Moo writes,

“Justification by faith granted the believer in this life is the sufficient cause of those works that God takes into account at the time of the judgment. The initial declaration of the believer’s acquittal before the bar of heaven at the time of one’s justification is infallibly confirmed by the judgment according to works at the last assize.”

## **2:12**

“As many as sin...” or “all who sin” These phrases encompass everyone - they are universal, as Paul goes on to declare in Romans 3:23 - “all have sinned...”

## **2:14-15**

Who is Paul talking about?

3 options:

- 1) Gentiles who fulfil the law and are saved apart from their faith in Christ.
- 2) **Gentiles who do some part of the law but who are not saved**
- 3) Gentile Christians who fulfil the law by virtue of their relationship to Christ.

The middle option (2) is right. 1) is alarmingly inconsistent with the rest of Paul’s argument in Romans and indeed the rest of the New Testament. 3) does not take into account the scope which Paul is writing with here.

Verse 14 relates closely to 1:32

## **Questions for discussion**

How easy is it to read Romans 1:18-32 and become like the ‘hypothetical’ person Paul addresses in Romans 2:1?

When are you most tempted to act in a judgmental manner? Are there instances when we should judge and if so how? (maybe discuss what Paul means in 1 Corinthians 2:15)

What does Paul mean when he says that the kindness of God is intended to lead us to repentance? How has this worked in your life? How should it shape our attitudes to others as the body of Christ?

How do you feel about being judged by works? Why should we have nothing to fear if we are in Christ? How does it affect the way we live our lives?