

## Studies in Romans

### Give Me Justice! (2:1-11)

#### Context

- **1:1-17 Introduction**
  - 1:1-5 Paul's greeting and a summary of the gospel
  - 1:6-15 Paul's relationship with the Romans
  - 1:16-17 Paul's thesis: God's gospel is powerful to save all who believe
- **1:18-4:25 The problem and God's solution**
  - 1:18-3:20 The problem: God's wrath at our unrighteousness
    - 1:18-32 Mankind is facing God's wrath, both now and, ultimately, in the future, because we have all rebelled against Him

Having outlined his gospel message and explained his commission to preach it (**1:1-17**), Paul has told the Romans of the devastating situation facing mankind. *Everyone* is under God's wrath (**v. 18** and see eventual point in **3:9** and **19**). The entire human race is under the judgement of God. God is angry because people rebel against God despite what they know (**1:18b**). Man has some knowledge of the reality of God—enough knowledge to worship and thank Him—but he suppresses what he knows (**1:19-21a**) and under God's judgement he falls down to one level of depravity after another (**1:21b-27**). The final stage is to be filled with all manner of sinfulness (**1:28-32**).

We *should* conclude that we have all been handed over. God is justly angry with everyone. We are all facing death (**v. 32**) and there is nothing that we can do about it.

#### Unanswered questions to consider:

- “Yes, but I'm not as bad as that!”
- “Yes, but I'm a Jew—one of God's chosen people!”
- “How is God going to solve this problem *righteously*?”

But I can imagine the letter:

*Dear Paul,*

*I've just read the second half of **Romans chapter 1**. I congratulate you on a vigorous, refreshing exposé of evil. I agree with you that it is disgusting when people not only behave badly but actually approve of bad behaviour. It did me good to read your chapter. You will be glad to know that I for one do not for a moment “approve of those who practice” (**v. 32**) these terrible things. On the contrary, I recognize them for the evils they are and agree that such people are “without excuse” (**v. 20**). I look forward to **chapter 2**.*

*Yours sincerely...*

Paul's point is to establish that there are no exceptions... **Chapter 2** continues the argument, because Paul knows that many of his hearers will not be convicted of their need of Christ by what was said in **1:18-32**. “But what about the ‘respectable sinner’?”

We can easily divide **2:1-29** into two sections: **vv. 1-11** and **vv. 12-29**.

- **2:1-11** – God will judge me by the same standards as everyone else.
- **2:12-29** – the only way to be right with God is to do what God wants.

## Every time I condemn someone else, I condemn myself before God (2:1-3)

*Describe the person condemned in v. 1. How might they respond to the sins described in Romans 1:18-32? What is Paul's message to them?*

Again, note the word “therefore.”

*So what's the point here? Is it wrong to disapprove/condemn evil?*

A couple points to notice:

- **There is more than one kind of sinner.**
- **Sin can be committed in a very quiet “respectable” way.**
- **The “moral” person uses his morality as a way of defending himself.** See also **Luke 15:25-32** and **Luke 18:11**.
- **The “moral” person is characterized by a critical spirit.** See **Luke 7:43; 1 Cor. 10:15; 11:13, etc.**
- **The self-righteously moral person will be condemned by his own standards.**

*What does Paul mean by us practicing “the very same things”?* See also **Matthew 7**.

*Can you give some examples that show how our intolerance of the bad behaviour of others is matched only by our leniency towards ourselves?*

See also **Matthew 5:21-48** and **James 2:10**.

- **All differences between people cannot cancel out the fact that all have sinned.**

*Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God?* **Romans 2:3 (ESV)**

*The answer ought to be what?* See also **Philippians 3:1ff**.

## God doesn't punish me straight away, to give me time to repent (2:4-5)

But an objection is raised. “If I am so guilty, why hasn't God punished me?”

Realize that every time God does *not* immediately punish us, he is leading us to repentance.

Note **v. 5**: *But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.*

**It is wrong to think that my security is only as strong as my most recent repentance, or that every time I sin I somehow place myself in danger of hell until I repent.**

Paul is not speaking to the penitent heart that lacks assurance. He is speaking to the impenitent heart that has a false assurance. See also **Matthew 3:7-10; 21:28-32**.

## **There are no exceptions to the fairness of God, so I really must repent (2:6-11)**

Note the ABBA format of **vv. 7-10**.

The idea that God has favourites is pretty deep-rooted, so Paul devotes **vv. 6-11** to tackling it. In the original language, **vv. 5 and 6** are closely connected. It literally reads: “on the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgement of God who will give to each person...” The quotations are from **Psalms 62:12** and that thought bookends this little section: “He will render to each one according to his works” and “God shows no partiality.”

So the point: God is fair. He makes no exceptions and that is taught consistently in Scripture. Examples: **Eccles. 12:14; Isa. 3:10ff; Jeremiah 17:10; Hosea 12:2; Matthew 7:21; Matthew 16:27; Matthew 25:31-46; John 5:28ff; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Cor. 11:15b; Gal. 6:7-9; Eph. 6:8; Col. 3:24ff; 2 Tim. 4:14; 1 Peter 1:17; Rev. 2:23; 20:12ff; 22:12**.

Back in Romans, note again the logical argument format (ABBA). He’s making a comprehensive case. *Everyone* is in one of those two groups. Each group includes some religious and some irreligious people and note: the most basic difference between mankind is not between Jew and Gentile, but between groups A & B!

But who are they? Who are these two groups? More specifically, is “Group A” a hypothetical group? Is it speaking of believers?

*Again, what is Paul’s point (in vv. 7-11)?*

So what hope do we have? Is it possible for anyone to escape God’s wrath?

## For further discussion

**IMPORTANT LESSON:** Beware of viewing yourself as “not that bad” or “not as bad as So-And-So.” Beware of looking at the list of sins in **1:29-31** and thinking that you’re good enough. Paul’s point in this section is that not only is there no excuse and no escape, but you are actually making things worse for yourself when judgement comes. So whenever we shake our heads at the world around us, we are completely missing the point about our own wickedness and God’s anger against us. Our excuses show our contempt for God’s patience.

### Questions:

*Why do people think they don’t deserve to face God’s judgement? What would your friends say?*

*What is Paul’s instant verdict on those who think themselves better than others?*

*People often portray heaven as sterile and boring, and hell as exciting and sociable—‘All my friends will be there.’ What does Paul say?*

*What impact does God’s refusal to show favouritism have on you personally? (Think about your current relationship with God as well as your relationships with other people.)*

*What does this section of Scripture say about how to please God?*