

## **A Study in Romans**

### **Study Two Romans 2:1-29**

#### **Day One**

1 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.

2 Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth.

3 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?

v. 1 – Chapter one certainly portrayed a dismal moral picture of the Gentile world—idolatry, sexual perversion and evil of every kind. You can understand why the Jews were so judgmental of the Gentile world, working to keep themselves separate from the world around them. But Paul here began to address Jews without mentioning them by name.

It is all too easy for me to pass my moral weakness on to someone else. The Jews were doing the same thing. They were making the Gentiles “carry” the moral lack that the Jews had but disguised through their slavish keeping of the Law. If the Jews had been honest, they would have confessed that the Law was impossible to keep and welcomed the opportunity to serve God in faith. Instead they clung to their customs to preserve their culture and identity as a people.

v. 2 – The Jews had accurately condemned the practices that Paul outlined in Romans chapter one, but they also practiced the things that they were condemning! This was hypocrisy of the highest order. They thanked God that they weren't Gentiles, and then acted like the Gentiles that they looked down upon.

v. 3 – Paul's people always felt that they would escape God's wrath because they were His chosen people. In the Old Testament, they resisted the pronouncements and warnings of the prophets, feeling that calamity would never come, even though they were not keeping God's commands. They felt that they were Jews and God somehow needed them and their Temple. They were wrong.

It is so easy to feel spiritual superiority to others because of our spiritual heritage or because of our personal history of obeying God at some point. John the Baptist addressed this when he saw the Pharisees standing on the sidelines, watching the people being baptized for their sins:

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think

you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire (Matthew 3:7-10).

The Pharisees were around the things of God, but they missed God! Later we are told:

All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John. But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John (Luke 7:29-30).

Watch yourself lest you become a spectator, watching others progress in the things of God while you rely on your past success or former spirituality.

No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize (1 Corinthians 9:27).

### **Day Two**

4 Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward 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.

6 God "will give to each person according to what he has done."

v. 4 – I have often mistaken God's silence or lack of dealings with me as a sign that He was happy with my spiritual progress or condition. I have often been wrong. I saw this tendency clearly described in Psalm 50:

16 But to the wicked, God says: "What right have you to recite my laws or take my covenant on your lips?

17 You hate my instruction and cast my words behind you.

18 When you see a thief, you join with him; you throw in your lot with adulterers.

19 You use your mouth for evil and harness your tongue to deceit.

20 You speak continually against your brother and slander your own mother's son.

21 These things you have done and I kept silent; you thought I was altogether like you. But I will rebuke you and accuse you to your face (Psalm 50:16-21).

I think it is a healthy spiritual exercise to personally identify with the wicked when I read the Bible. Don't assume that the wicked are someone else; think of the wicked as at least part of who you are. That will keep you from being spiritually deceived.

v. 5 – In the Old Testament, we learned that "Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry (1 Samuel 15:23 NKJV). Stubbornness says, "I

know better and I'm not going to change for anyone or anything." It is amazing to me that I can be stubborn where God is concerned, refusing to adjust to His will in my life.

There is a day of God's wrath, whether that be a specific event in this life or the judgment to come. We are warned of how God can do something now by the wisdom author.

A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed--without remedy (Proverbs 29:1).

God just doesn't let someone sit in his or her stubbornness. He acts against them because they have stubbornly and pridefully ignored His appeals. Whenever I have had God "deal" with me, I can look back and see how God had been trying to get my attention all along. I, however, had ignored Him. I was stubborn.

v. 6 – I am fond of saying that God has a big book and a sharp pencil and he "remembers" all that we have done, both for good and evil. This truth is quite simple:

"Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).

Are you storing up good deeds so that your judgment will go well?

### **Day Three**

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.

v. 7 – The New Testament urges us not to give up or to be persistent in doing good. That must mean that there are times when doing good seems to have no reward and you are tempted to abandon doing good. I can think of several other passages that speak to this phenomenon:

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up (Galatians 6:8-9).

You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." But we are not of those who shrink

back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved (Hebrews 10:36-39).

There is a personal reward for doing good and there is nothing wrong with working toward receiving that good. That is not selfish; that is just smart.

v. 8 – Self-seeking is not to pursue the rewards associated with good deeds, but rather to reject the truth and pursue evil. Self-seeking is doing what you want instead of what God wants.

Vs. 9-11 – I wonder if Paul was writing to address the belief among Jews and Gentiles that God showed favoritism to the Jews, regardless of their moral behavior. Paul truly had come a long way in his own understanding that Gentiles and Jews were equal in the sight of God. The prophet Jeremiah had to deliver the same message or at least one that said the Jews were nothing special just because they had the Temple of God in their midst:

Do not trust in deceptive words and say, "This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!" If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your forefathers for ever and ever. But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless.

"Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, "We are safe"--safe to do all these detestable things? Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching!" declares the LORD (Jeremiah 7:4-11).

Christians can be guilty of the same deception. We can think that because we have the Spirit of God, manifest the gifts of the Spirit or belong to a certain denomination, we are free from the consequences of sin. That is simply not true.

Paul made this simple statement of fact: God does *not* show favoritism.

#### **Day Four**

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 since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.)

16 This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

v. 12 – This verse deals with the common belief that everyone will be judged according to what they know concerning God, so that someone who never heard the gospel could indeed be saved. The truth is that those who heard the Law will be judged according to the Law and those who did not hear the Law will be judged by what they knew to be true according to the moral law that worked within them and the general revelation that was all around them.

But whether one had access to the Law prior to the final judgment will be taken into consideration by a just God. Consider these two passages that speak to the severity of judgment for those with or without knowledge of the Law:

But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you" (Matthew 11:22-24).

"That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked" (Luke 12:47-48).

So the God of justice will judge each man, but will hold those who were exposed to and disobeyed specific revelation to a higher standard and they will incur a stricter judgment. At the same time, all will be judged according to whether they put their trust in Jesus Christ for salvation.

v. 13 – There is a subtle deception in many, even today, that hearing and giving mental assent to the truth is enough to make one righteous. But it is only those who hear and **do** the words of God who will be considered righteous. Jesus said the same thing:

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash" (Matthew 7:24-27).

Are you doing what you hear in regards to God's will? Don't be lulled into a false sense of security just because you agree with what you read and hear.

vs. 14&15 – Many have used this verse to prove the existence of God. Let me explain. C.S. Lewis and others have pointed out that there is a moral standard or right and wrong in each person. This standard seems to be a universal rule of good behavior, although it varies somewhat from person to person. But many people “feel bad” if they are selfish or mistreat someone else. They may ignore these feelings, but they are there.

These feelings reside in what is called the conscience, which either tries to defend bad behavior or seeks to correct it. Some feel that “conscience” is the remnant of the image of God in which all mankind was created. This moral standard in all people therefore proves the existence of a righteous God, apart from man, who holds every man accountable for his or her deeds.

One side note about conscience: it is not infallible or perfect. It can be so ignored that it becomes warped or almost nonexistent, and it must be educated to fully understand the righteous requirements of God. So someone may do wrong and not “feel bad” or not have their conscience accuse them (see also 1 Timothy 4:2).

v. 16 – Paul once again referenced the last judgment and Jesus made constant reference to the judgment as well. It is impossible to believe that there is no accountability for all men not according to what they knew but according to what God required of them.

### **Day Five**

17 Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God;

18 if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law;

19 if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark,

20 an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth-

v. 17 – Paul was addressing the sense of superiority that existed in the minds of his fellow Jews. They “bragged” about their relationship with God like they had “cornered the market” on God. Some Christian denominations and movements feel the same way. They think that their special insight indicates a special relationship with God. Whatever you may have from God, you received by grace. You did not earn it, nor did you do anything special to deserve it.

I had a pastor say to me once, “It's hard to be humble when you're good.” We were at a church where the young pastor and his flock were very proud of their progress in the church. They had a touch of arrogance that said, “If everyone would do things like we

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do, then they would be successful.” Today that church is half the size it was and that pastor is no longer in ministry. God resists the proud and I would dare say that God resisted that church because of their attitude.

How about you? Is your attitude one of arrogance that you have earned what you have, or one of humility, realizing that God’s grace is your source? Arrogance will also cause you to keep the things of God to yourself, since you “own” them. But your attitude should be according to what Jesus said:

“Freely you have received, freely give” (Matt 10:8).

v. 18 – The will of God is superior to anything else and God is superior as well. You just can’t let the attitude creep in that *you* are superior.

vs. 19& 20 – If you believe that you are to teach from a superior position, you will probably be condescending as you teach. You must teach as one who is just as affected by sin as those whom you are teaching. Otherwise your attitude of superiority will come through and hinder your teaching. I have a series of essays entitled “Teaching as a Path to Servant Leadership” at <http://www.purposequest.com/articles.htm>. These essays are designed to help anyone who is teaching to understand that they are servant leaders, serving God, the students and serving the body of truth that they are imparting.

### **Day Six**

21 you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal?  
22 You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?  
23 You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law?  
24 As it is written: "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

Vs. 21-24 – It seems that Paul, having been an insider as the Pharisee Saul, knew that the Jews did not live up to the righteousness they taught. Paul had firsthand knowledge that there was a great deal of corruption and Jesus referred to this during his ministry as well:

"It is written," he said to them, "'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers'" (Matthew 21:13).

So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them (Matthew 23:3-4).

The Jews were so convinced that they had special standing with God that they became lax in carrying out the moral commands that they taught others. But Christians are not

exempt from this tendency as evidenced by many of the public scandals of prominent and not-so-prominent leaders. The sad byproduct of these moral failures is that God's name is mocked among unbelievers. People scoff at the reality of God when they see the unreality that His people walk in. When the church has a public relations problem, so to speak, it often becomes a public relations problem for God as well.

### **Day Seven**

25 Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised.

26 If those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised?

27 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.

28 A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical.

29 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.

v. 25 – Circumcision was an outward sign of the covenant people of God, but obviously had become a ritual that had lost its spiritual significance for many Jews. They felt that circumcision became more important than obeying the laws of God. The same is true today for Christians who believe that some outward sign—baptism, speaking in tongues, or church membership—is more important than righteous behavior. They actually put their trust in that outward sign instead of their faith in Jesus.

The only way an outward sign has any value is if it is accompanied by obedience. Where have you put your trust?

v. 26 – If those without the outward sign obey God's laws, they will be considered as if they had the outward sign. Paul again emphasized that it's obedience that counted.

v. 27 – This would have been a hard statement to anyone who was circumcised. It would have been almost impossible for a Jew to comprehend that a righteous Gentile could condemn a circumcised, but disobedient Jew. In the eyes of many Jews, their special standing with God was based on their external symbols and not the condition of the heart.

vs. 28&29 – Paul would not have devoted so much time to this issue unless it was a dominant theme in the Roman church. In these verses, he made one of the most important statements in the New Testament concerning who and what a Jew is. Outward signs and acts don't make someone a Jew. A true Jew is one who has a circumcised heart. Being Jewish is a spiritual matter, not a physical matter.

Circumcision was to be symbolic of a heart issue, where the flesh of the heart was to be removed so that one could obey God with a whole heart. The best description I ever heard of circumcision was that it was a sign of death at a point of life. Here is what else Paul had to write about the issue of circumcision, perhaps the most important symbol of the covenant for a Jew:

Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts (1 Corinthians 7:19).

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love (Galatians 5:6).

For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—though I myself have reasons for such confidence (Philippians 3:3-4).

In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead (Colossians 2:11-12).

These are amazing statements for Paul to make, for Paul had been a Jew and would have held to the beliefs that he was now challenging. Paul came to realize that he had been working for the praise of men—his fellow Jews and Pharisees—and not the praise that comes from God. Whose praise are you working for? Do you desire praise from your bishop, pastor, or fellow believers than you do from God? That is a dangerous position in which to be.

Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God (John 12:42-43).

Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God (1 Corinthians 4:5).

I trust that you, dear reader, are working for God's approval and that this desire will show clearly in what you do for Him.