

**Welcome - (~3 min)**

- Make announcements, take attendance (if you do more than just a head count), etc..

Opening prayer – (~1 min)**Opening Comments – (~3 min)**

- In turning to Chapter 2, you have most likely recognized an association to **1:18-32**.
- Human inadequacy in the light of divine standards continues to characterize the discussion (cf. **2:1**, "*no excuse*," with **1:20**, "*without excuse*").
- The indictment continues to be stated first in broad terms, with no indication whether the people being discussed are Jews or Gentiles (cf. **1:18; 2:1**), but as the picture unfolds, the Jew takes shape before our eyes just as the Gentile has come into focus in the previous weeks.
- Likewise, in both portions, general terms for sin are followed by very specific accusations (cf. **1:18** with **1:23, 26-32** and **2:1-16** with **2:17-29**).
- The implication in Paul's opening verse most likely directed at religious leaders or lawyers in keeping with his other letters and dealing with Judaizing problems (i.e., circumcision, Jewish customs).
- They heartily endorse Paul's verdict rendered concerning the Gentiles.
- However, Paul is indicating the Jews fail to realize their own plight.
- Are we that different today than the people Paul is writing to?
- The old saying that when our one finger identifies the other sinner's sin, three are pointing back at us!
- As a lawyer would state, true judgment rests on the ability to discern the facts in a given case.
- If one is able to see the sin and hopelessness of the Gentiles, he should logically be able to see himself as being in the same, or at least similar, predicament.
- However, most people are so taken up with the faults of others that we don't consider our own failures (cf. **Matt 7:2, 3**)
- Paul speaks some words which we find difficult today and rarely hear: judgment, unrepentant heart, sin – and especially Paul's words in **2:16**, "*This will take place on the day when God will judge men's (women implied here by grammatical correctness) secrets through Jesus Christ...*"
- You see in studying this passage Paul's progression to identify the *failure of their religion*.
- He begins with their judgment of others because of being pious, he implies they have turned the Jewish law into a form of religion, and lastly, he identifies their religion as being external, not of the heart as God intended.
- We need to evaluate such things in our family of faith both individually and corporately to be sure we are not guilty of similar offenses today.
- Let's go through the study lesson:

Discussion of the Study Lesson – (~48 min)

This week's Aim: *The power of the gospel to save the lost: the failure of religion.*

Paul's Letter to the Romans

Topic for Day 1: An overview of this week's passage – Romans 2:1-3:8

1. What key words or phrases do you see repeated in this passage?

(judgment, righteous(ness), unrighteous(ness), Law, you – who, do you, circumcision, outward, inward)

2. (+ 2 min) What reason does Paul give in verse 1 that these people are without an excuse?

(they thought they were free from judgment because they were God's chosen people but Paul is affirming that God's election of the Jews actually made their responsibility and accountability even greater)

3. (+1 min) What religious terms are used in this passage?

(Circumcision – this was the great mark of the covenant and had its beginning with Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation (Genesis 17)).

(+1 min) Application 1: What will you apply to your life this week from the sermon?

(+2 min) Topic for Day 2: God judges all people according to His truth, their actions, and without favoritism. – 1-16

- In our last lesson, Paul spoke of how the entire human race was *unrighteous* – all are sinners!
- In this chapter, his focus moves to those who see themselves as *righteous (self-righteousness)* and/or *religious* (unlike the heathen/pagan – [Gentiles/Jews – depending of whom Paul is directing this chapter]) and view themselves above “those sinners.” But he knows their righteous/religious actions are more from their heads than their hearts.
- Paul identifies some “**standards**” by which God will judge people – let's begin

1. (+2 min) In verses 1-5, how do you see that God's judgment is based on truth?

- **Read Romans 2:1-5** (or have someone read it)

(+1 min) Listen for answers – (**vs. 2** states *His judgment is based on truth!* – the quick answer)

(+1 min) Paul is not being redundant in **verse 1**, “*no excuse*,” his focus has shifted to something different.

- He demonstrates that often *self-righteous and/or religious* people don't live by their own standards.
- **Verse 2** answers the question about God's judgment being based on truth – **Read 2:2**
- So Paul identifies here, the **first standard of God's judgment is truth.**
- Paul warns in (**2:3**) that people need to stop judging others because they will be judged by the same standard with which they judge others
- Matthew 7:2 supports this same idea, “*For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*”
- God is immutable so therefore, what Paul says in **2:1-3**, applies to us today – **judging a person's relationship with God is God's business** –
- Only God has the power and wisdom to judge with righteousness, truth, and justice (**Ps. 96:13** “*they will sing before the LORD, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth*” and **Ps. 98:9** “*let them sing before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity*”).
- [The only judging Christians are to do is described in **Matthew 18:15-17** “*If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax*

collector." This is to be done with compassion and fairness but if he refuses to listen, then treat him/her as if they were an unbeliever until they change]

- Paul warns there is no escaping God's judgment because His judgment is **based on truth!**
- In (2:4) Paul gives an example of God's grace towards people, he says people "*show contempt for His kindness, tolerance, and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance.*"
- This is a perfect example that our God doesn't want anyone to perish!
- How *kind, tolerant, and patient* was He with the Jewish people in Scripture? Here's some examples:
- He gave Israel great material and spiritual riches: a wonderful land, a righteous Law, a temple and priesthood, His providential provision and protection, His Holy word, and the list goes on!
- Paul gives another warning in (2:5) - because of stubbornness and unrepentant hearts, the people were storing up wrath against themselves – His *righteous* judgment will *be revealed* (future tense).

2. (+3 min) **In verses 2:6-10, what actions bring God's blessings and what actions bring His wrath and indignation?**

- **Blessings:** 2:7 "*those who by persistence in doing good, seek [for-NAS] glory, honor, and immortality, He will give eternal life.*" And 2:10 "*but glory, honor, and peace for everyone who does good*"
- **Wrath:** "*those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger*"
- **Verse 6** brings us to the **second standard of God's judgment** – People's performance
- It is very important to understand that Paul is talking about judgment here, not salvation –
- Paul is saying all people's works will be judged! Christian's works are those in service to Him!
- There are two kinds of judgment: 1) **Punitive** – this is the judgment of the unsaved
- It is a harsh judgment, dreadful, it's a warning for sinners to **flee** to Christ, it's an eternal judgment
- The judgment is that souls will be in an eternal, conscious state of being separated from God!
- 2) **Evaluative** – this judgment is based on how well Christians have served Christ as His disciples in this life. CAUTION: this verse could be taken out of context and leave one to think Paul is saying salvation is by works – Not what he is saying at all!
- Paraphrasing Paul, "**Doing good should come naturally following our profession of faith!**"

3. (+2 min) **In verses 11-16, in what ways is God's judgment different than the way people judge?**

- Some ways human judgment pales in comparison with God's: people's crimes are not discovered; people get off on legal technicalities; people get off because of bad character witnesses; poor judges; paid jurors, etc..
- God's judgment is **based on truth**, He **knows our actions**, and He **doesn't show favoritism!**
- **Vs. 2:11** "*For God does not show favoritism*"
- This is the **third standard of God's judgment** – He doesn't show favoritism
- Peter made the same statement in **Acts 10:34** "*Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism"* Peter's understanding is in sync with Paul's.
- **Read Gal. 3:28-29** "*There is **neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise***"
- **Vss 12-13** – we see the **forth standard God will use to judge: Obedience to the law**
- What law? Moses' law is found in **Exodus 20**. What person besides Jesus Christ has ever kept all the commandments – none!

(+3 min) **Read 2:14-15** – Paul is saying that some people, by nature, have the law written on their hearts

Paul's Letter to the Romans

- That means there are people with an inner sense of right and wrong (God's version); and this inner judge, the Bible calls "*conscience*" – people in all cultures sense sin, fear of judgment, need to atone for their sins and appease whatever gods they fear.

(+1 min) **Application 2: Is there something you do that takes advantage of God's kindness, tolerance, and patience (vs. 2:4)? How will you begin correcting that today?**

(+2 min) **Topic for Day 3: Paul questions the Jewish leaders for relying on their possession the law. - 2:17-24**

1. **List some of the advantages the Jews had been given by God regarding the law:**

- Paul identifies 8 important claims the Jewish *religious* people made (vss. 17-20). Four were their spiritual advantages and four were their religious privileges. Here is the list:

Spiritual advantages they claimed:	Religious privileges they claimed:
1. God had given them His law (2:17)	1. They were guides for the (<i>spiritually</i>) blind (2:19)
2. They had a special relationship with God (2:17)	2. They were light to those in darkness (2:19)
3. They claimed they <i>knew</i> His will (2:18, 20b)	3. They instructed the foolish (2:20)
4. They approved of His superior moral standard (2:18)	4. They taught the spiritual infants (2:20)

2. (+2 min) **In verses 21-23, list the comparisons of "You who" with the corresponding questions "do you" and state what you learn from this:**

"You who"	"do you"
1. You who teach	1. Do you teach yourself?
2. You who preach against stealing	2. Do you steal?
3. You who say – don't commit adultery	3. Do you commit adultery?
4. You who abhor idols	4. Do you rob temples?
5. You who brag about the law	5. Do you dishonor God by breaking the law?

- Paul's point seems to be that if we teach/preach/claim a standard for others and we don't keep it ourselves, then we have what he describes in 2:24 "*As it is written: "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you (Paul paraphrased Isaiah 52:5)."*
- This should be a very sobering thought for us today! Do we cause God's name to be blasphemed because we do not keep the standards we claim for others!

3. (+2 min) **Read Exodus 20:1-17 and try to identify the commandments Paul accuses the Jews of breaking:**

- The Jews viewed themselves as above the Gentiles/pagans and yet Paul is striking out against that attitude
- He challenged their attitudes by identifying the 8th commandment against stealing (2:21);
- The 7th commandment against adultery (2:22);
- The first two commandments concerning the correct worship of God (2:21-23)

4. (+1 min) **What is the result of anyone who violates the standards they proclaim (vs. 24)?**

- Paul is saying that instead glorifying God among the Gentiles, the Jews were dishonoring God by their boasts of *self-righteousness* and *religiosity* which was in many ways actually worse than the Gentiles and heathens.

Paul's Letter to the Romans

- We need to be careful of what we profess and the standards we hold others to or we could because this very same reaction of the “*unsaved, lost, unregenerate*” to *blasphemy* God!
 - You can also see how this dovetails with Paul's statements in **Romans 2:1-4**
- (+1 min) **Application 3: Name one way you have fallen short of what you believe the Bible teaches? What are some advantages God has given you that you can share with others this week?**

Topic for Day 4: The failure of religion – Read 2:25-29

1. (+2 min) **If you would like a challenge, use your Bible references to look up circumcision, what it is, why it was important, and then explain why the Jews might be proud of it.**

- Circumcision was a sign of God's covenant with Israel, it was instituted in **Genesis 17**, and it guaranteed God's blessings on Israel.
- Three other passages to refer to:

Jer. 4:4 “Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, circumcise your hearts, you men of Judah and people of Jerusalem or my wrath will break out and burn like fire because of the evil you have done”

1 Cor. 7:19 “Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts.”

Gal. 5:3 “Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law.”

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2. (+2 min) **Reading verses 25-29, identify terms we use in our religious sacraments that could be substituted for the word *circumcision* in these verses. What is the caution Paul states in 25?**
(We might relate circumcision ceremony to our present day ceremony of baptism)
- Circumcision was very important to the Jews. He had to be circumcised.
 - Circumcision made the young man a member of the church, his salvation was assured.
 - In our day, both communion and baptism point to the spiritual realities of salvation and help strengthen our faith.
 - They do not however, have the capability of saving us. They are only external evidences of our commitment to Jesus Christ.

3. (+1 min) **In these verses Paul has described the character of a *true Jew*. What are your thoughts as to how this applies to you today?**

- Best response to this is to **read 2:28-29** and relate that to us today. God is interested in our heart condition as Paul has been arguing. Just as a man is only a Jew if he is one internally, the same is true of a Christian.
- Ceremonies, sacraments, church attendance, service projects, singing in the choir, leading groups, and the list goes on.
- These are all wonderful activities within the family of Christ, but they do not save anyone!

4. (+2 min) **Paul has described the character of a true Jew. How would you describe the character of a true Christian?**

- Listen to people's response – be careful this doesn't become a *judgment* conversation – that would be exactly like what Paul is talking about in this chapter.

(+1 min) **Application 4: Is there a "religious practice" that you need to move from head knowledge to a heart experience? If there is, how will you begin today to make that change? If not, write a prayer of thanks:**

Topic for Day 5: God is faithful in spite of the Jews failure in their religion. – 3:1-8

1. (+2 min) **Why was being entrusted with the *very words of God* (vs. 1) an advantage to the Jews?**

- Paul uses the word *logia* (Greek) here. It could be termed a technical word because it identifies the Old Testament Scriptures as *God's own words*.
- An interesting point is made about this statement by B. B. Warfield, a professor at Princeton Theological Seminary from 1887-1921. He wrote, "We have unobtrusive and convincing evidence... that the Old Testament Scriptures... were esteemed by the writers of the New Testament as... nothing other than a crystallized speech of God."
- You can relate the answer to this question to the advantages/privileges table of Day 3 question 1.

2. (+2 min) **What advantage do you have as a result of owning and reading your Bible?**

- Personal responses should be very interesting. This is a question you might briefly share a part of your answer.

3. (+2 min) **What was Paul saying in his argument regarding our unrighteousness and God's righteousness? Give an example of such logic used today by people:**

- Paul uses a simple debating trick in his comments about our unrighteousness and how it affects God's righteousness
- Paul's little argument goes something like this: According to Paul's teaching, God receives glory when He saves us from sin. If that is true, then after we become Christians, then we should continue sinning so we can bring more glory to God!
- Unfortunately, there are people who use logic like this! Paul knew that!
- An example would be: Talking to a man in jail for being drunk. He says, how can I witness to an alcoholic if I have never been drunk myself? Or, God is ok with my divorce. He is preparing me for sharing the gospel with other divorced people. Or, how could I possibly think I could witness to someone on drugs if I have never been high myself.
- These are actual statements some of us have heard people use. God doesn't work that way and Paul was trying to get that point across to those in Rome.
- The caution is stated very clear by Paul, "*Their condemnation is deserved.*" (3:8)

(+1 min) **Application 5: How have you seen God being faithful to you even when you were unfaithful to Him? How could you share that with someone today?**

(+2 min)

Closing Comments – (~4 min)

- This passage may sound a bit harsh and "unfair" to someone who just does a cursory read, but Paul is making a very sound argument to the church at Rome of how God's judgment is "Perfectly fair".

Paul's Letter to the Romans

- Excerpts from “Hard Sayings of the Bible,”¹ “First, Paul’s purpose in writing this (**2:12** specifically but passage in general) is not to discuss the issue of judgment on pagans. He is writing to the church in Rome in order to address the issue in his teaching which caused the most controversy, his insistence that both Jews and Gentiles could come to God on the same basis, that of the grace of Jesus. At this point in his argument he is pointing out that Jews who hear and understand the law but do not actually obey it are under the judgment of God. Jewish religious practice will not make one any better off before God if one lives sinfully (**2:13**).”
- It goes on, “The Jews assumed that the pagans (Gentiles) were under God’s judgment, for they did not observe the commands of God as stated in the (*Mosaic*) law. Paul is arguing that Jews who did not obey all the law were also under the judgment of God. Both were equally in need of salvation through Jesus, and thus the Jews’ Judaism did not give them any advantage in this respect.
- Second, Paul does know of a source of revelation for all Gentiles, as we read in **Romans 2:14-16**.
- Paul’s point is that even the Gentile cultures he knew of taught the main virtues and condemned the main vices mentioned in the Mosaic Law. Roman and Greek law condemned murder, stealing, adultery just as the Mosaic Law did... The point is that the main virtues of the Mosaic Law can be found in most pagan legal traditions.
- Thus, third, Paul is teaching that people will be judged according to the standards that they know, not according to the standards they do not know...
- How fair is God? Paul’s answer would be, “Perfectly fair!” Pagans will not be judged on the basis of a law of which they are ignorant... Pagans will be judged on the basis of their obedience to the law that they find written in their own hearts, their violations of their own consciences.... And not only pagans will be judged on this basis but also the Jews. They know the Mosaic law, so they will be judged, not on their knowledge, but on their obedience.”
- A thought for us is “If we ignore the rich knowledge that we have, a pagan who obeys the little knowledge he or she has may be better off than we.”
- This is very good teaching and if we are wise, we will listen and apply it to our lives.
- So in closing, Paul has demonstrated the church in Rome was experiencing a failed religion.
- He did this by showing their pious views of themselves led to judging others with standards they didn't follow themselves, they relied on the law (almost as a religion in itself), and their religious experiences were based on external things as opposed to internal hearts.
- Paul knew this was dangerous for the church in Rome (*or any church is implied - even churches today*).
- Where is the hope in all this? Does it just keep getting worse?
- Continue doing these studies and you will see there is some wonderful things yet to come from Paul!

Closing Prayers – (~1 min)

¹ “Hard Sayings from the Bible,” Walter C. Kaiser Jr., Peter H. Davids, F.F. Bruce, and Manfred T. Brauch, ISBN 0-8308-1423-x, pp. 545-547