

Romans – Bible Study – Chapter 2:1-16

Henri and Roberto have been trying to share their faith with Nick, one of their engineering classmates. One Saturday over coffee, with the Bible study on Romans 1:18-32 they'd just finished the night before at Campus Gospel Youth Group fresh on their minds, they got talking with Nick about God's wrath and about the need for a Savior... to which Nick replied, "I just can't accept that. Sure, there has to be a hell for guys like Hitler - I get that. But I'm a good person. It's not like I'm a drug dealer or like I've ever killed anyone or robbed a bank! I don't sleep around like some of the guys in the class do... I've never even been drunk! I think I live as clean a life as either of you! How can you tell me that if I died tonight, that God would send me to hell, just because I don't believe in your Jesus?" What would you say to Nick?

For review: God's Wrath on Unrighteousness

1. **For review:** From the previous study in Romans 1:18-32, why is everyone deserving of God's wrath? Why is everyone "without excuse"?
 - God's wrath is revealed against the "ungodliness and unrighteousness of men"
 - God has revealed Himself in His Creation; His invisible attributes - his eternal power and divine nature are clearly seen by all- so all are without excuse (1:20)
 - but although men knew God, they did not honor Him or give thanks to Him, but chose instead to reject Him and live in rebellion against Him by
 - suppressing God's truth (v. 18)
 - ignoring God's revelation (v.19-20)
 - perverting God's glory (v. 21-23)
 - living lives contrary to God's order and commands (v.24-31)
 - applauding/encouraging others who do the same (v.32)

God's Righteous Judgment

Read Romans 2:1-16

2. (v.1-4) Who is Paul addressing in this passage when he says, "Therefore **you**..."? (see also 2:17) What does Paul mean when he says that this person(s) has "no excuse" (cf. 1:18-20), and why? Why might this person(s) think otherwise? (2:1-4; cf. Luke 18:9-12; 3:7-9, esp. v.8)
 - "you" is singular in the Greek - Paul is having imaginary dialogue (literary device: diatribe) with someone who is confident in his own self-righteousness and therefore thinks that God's wrath (as Paul describes it in 1:18-32) applies only to others, and not to himself
 - generally speaking, a person who considers himself to be a good, "moral" person - doesn't think he does what Paul was talking about in 1:18-32 (e.g. Luke 18:9-12)
 - more specifically, Paul is most likely referring to Jews (cf. 2:17ff)
 - such a person might think he will not be subject to God's judgment because he is 'better' or more moral than others - doesn't do the unrighteous things that others do
 - beyond this, a Jew might believe that his status as part of a people in special covenant relationship with God meant he was not subject God's judgment (i.e. would be shown special favor by God) (cf. Luke 3:8)

- but Paul makes it clear that all are subject to God's judgment, whether Jew or Greek
 - "you have no excuse" (v.1) - brings us back to 1:20, where he says that "men are without excuse" wrt God's righteous wrath being poured out on them
 - they will not escape the judgment of God
 - in judging others, the person is condemning himself, since in reality, he does exactly the same things that he's judging in others
3. (v.3-6) How does such a person show contempt for the riches of God's kindness ? What will be the result of such presumption?
- by passing judgment on others (looking down on & condemning others; thinking self better than others) while doing the same things himself (cf. Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28; James 2:10-11) - i.e. a hypocritical judging that is not according to truth - sees others' sins, but not own sins (cf. Matthew 7:1-5)
 - this fails to recognize God's kindness and patience extended towards that person - which is meant to bring him to repentance, not to cause them to look down on & judge others
 - rather than a soft, repentant heart, this shows a stubborn, impenitent heart
 - as a result, such a person is heaping up more and more wrath for himself, which will come on the day of judgment, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed
4. What do we learn about God's judgment in this passage? What implications does this have for the person(s) Paul is addressing?
- 2:2
- God judges "rightly" (ESV), or "based on truth" (NIV) - all who "practice such things" (as listed in 1:18-32) are rightly judged by Him
- 2:6-10
- God judges according to a person's works (ESV) (according to what someone has done)
- 2:11
- God judges without partiality/favoritism - the same standard applies to everyone
- 2:12-16
- God judges in accordance with the light a person has
 - those with the law (i.e. God's law in the OT) will be judged by the law
 - those without the law will be judged & perish apart from the law
 - also, God will one day judge even men's secrets through Jesus Christ, the Judge
- those who think they can escape God's judgment on their own merits or because they somehow have an "in" with God will be in for a rude awakening
5. Do verses 2:6-10 and 2:13 teach that people can be saved by their good works? Why, or why not? (consider also 3:9,19-20) (and if not, how then *can* we be saved?)

- on the surface, these verses seem to suggest that at least some people could be saved by persistence in doing good works
- in theory, it might be possible to be declared righteous in God's sight by perfectly obeying God's law
- however, Paul makes clear throughout Romans 1-3 that there is no one, Jew or Gentile, without sin, and that all alike are deserving of God's wrath
 - Galatians 3:21 also says that if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law (i.e. by doing good works in obedience to the law)
- Paul therefore states repeatedly that no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by keeping the law (i.e. through his own good works) (Rom. 3:19-20; also, for example, Galatians 2:15-16; 3:10-11)
- the sole exception to this is Jesus Christ, who perfectly obeyed the law (8:3; also 2 Corinthians 5:21; Heb. 4:15), and whose righteousness is credited to those who believe in Him (3:21-24)

-For further thought: From 2:13, who are the "doers of the law" (ESV) (or "those who obey the law" (NIV), who are justified/declared righteous? Is this verse (together with 2:7 and 2:10) describing a purely hypothetical situation? (you might consider also Rom. 1:5, 16:26; 1 John 3:21-24)

- 2:7,10,13 seem not just to be purely hypothetical
- Paul speaks of "the obedience of faith" in Rom. 1:5 & 16:26
- those who believe in Jesus Christ are counted righteous in Christ because of what He has done (justification) (Rom. 3:21-24), but are also regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who enables them to walk in obedience to God (sanctification) (cf. 2:29; 8:1-17)
- not that the believer's good deeds/obedience that earn his salvation, but sanctification & justification are inseparable - 2 sides of a coin
 - those who are justified through faith in Christ will persist in doing good/obeying God's law, and will receive eternal life, etc., as per 2:7,10,13

6. Does 2:12-16 imply that some people (i.e. those who "do not have the law" (2:14)) are saved apart from faith in Jesus Christ?

- No - 2:12 says that all who have sinned without the law **will perish** without the law
- these verses say that there is an innate sense of right and wrong in humanity - i.e. that they can, by nature, do what the law requires
 - e.g. most cultures know that adultery and stealing are wrong, even if they don't have God's Law
- their conscience will accuse them, even if at times it may defend them (i.e. if they did something wrong unknowingly (cf. Gen. 20:1-6))
- 1:18-20 makes it clear that all are without excuse, and are subject to God's wrath
- cf. Acts 4:12 - salvation is found in no one else (than Jesus Christ), and there is no other name under heaven given to men by which they must be saved

In Romans 1, Paul established that mankind is deserving of God's righteous wrath, in particular those who have chosen to reject God and His truth, and to live in open rebellion against His rule. In 2:1-16, he addresses those who think themselves to be exempt from God's judgment, whether they imagine themselves to be morally superior to others, or to have some special favor with God. Such people fail to understand not only the nature of God's judgment, but also the kindness that God is extending to them so that they might turn to Him in repentance. As a result, they are "storing up wrath" for themselves and will be in for a bad surprise on the Day of Judgment, when God's righteous judgment against them will be revealed. While Paul most likely had Jews in mind as he wrote this passage of Scripture, it applies equally to anyone who thinks he can be saved on any basis other than by faith in Jesus Christ, whether it's because he's a "good person", or because he was born in a Christian family and baptized as a child, or because he goes to church every week.

On what - or on whom - are you basing your hope of being saved from God's coming wrath? If you are relying on your own goodness or some special favor with God apart from Jesus Christ, realize that these will not save you on the day when God's righteous judgment is revealed. Realize also that God is showing you kindness, patience and forbearance so that you might turn to Him in repentance, to place your hope and your trust in Jesus Christ, who alone can save you. If you have placed your trust in Jesus Christ, give thanks to God for Him, and seek to live in obedience to Him. Knowing what it is to fear the Lord, seek also share the good news of Jesus Christ with those around you.