

ROMANS

As we look at Romans Chapter 2 in this lesson, I want to preface our study with a few words about "non-standard" Bible versions and my use of them occasionally during our studies. I understand, first of all, the importance of maintaining the authority and inerrancy of scripture in all that we study. It is equally important that I as a teacher, never promote anything that might add to or take away from God's written and Holy Word.

Having said that, I will in fact use versions other than King James when it makes understanding easier and helps us to reach the lost around us. For many people, I know that Romans Chapter 2 can be difficult to read, not to mention understand, if read in the King James version alone. I regard this chapter to be a foundational chapter, and one that we cannot miss the importance of. To that end, I have provided below the text of Romans Chapter 2 from the American Bible Society's CEV—Contemporary English Version, Copyright 1995. To the best of my knowledge and ability, I do not find that the CEV violates any Biblical tenets or hermeneutical rules. More importantly, I do not find that it distorts or waters down God's Holy Word.

I also believe that the use of a single chapter is within and according to the rules around using copyrighted material for our purposes. Having said all that, I hope that I offend no one, and that together all of us will grow in our walk and faith this week as we study this chapter together.

Please read the following text, or Romans Chapter 2 text from your version, before answering the questions that follow.

Romans 2

God's Judgment Is Fair

¹Some of you accuse others of doing wrong. But there is no excuse for what you do. When you judge others, you condemn yourselves, because you are guilty of doing the very same things. ²We know that God is right to judge everyone who behaves in this way. ³Do you really think God won't punish you, when you behave exactly like the people you accuse? ⁴You surely don't think much of God's wonderful goodness or of his patience and willingness to put up with you. Don't you know that the reason God is good to you is because he wants you to turn to him?

⁵But you are stubborn and refuse to turn to God. So you are making things even worse for yourselves on that day when he will show how angry he is and will judge the world with fairness. ⁶God will reward each of us for what we have done. ⁷He will give eternal life to everyone who has patiently done what is good in the hope of receiving glory, honor, and life that lasts forever. ⁸But he will show how angry and furious he can be with every selfish person who rejects the truth and wants to do evil. ⁹All who are wicked will be punished with trouble and suffering. It doesn't matter if they are Jews or Gentiles. ¹⁰But all who do right will be rewarded with glory, honor, and peace, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. ¹¹God doesn't have any favorites!

¹²Those people who don't know about God's Law will still be punished for what they do wrong. And the Law will be used to judge everyone who knows what it says. ¹³God accepts those who obey his Law, but not those who simply hear it.

¹⁴Some people naturally obey the Law's commands, even though they don't have the Law. ¹⁵This proves that the conscience is like a law written in the human heart. And it will show whether we are forgiven or condemned, ¹⁶when God appoints Jesus Christ to judge everyone's secret thoughts, just as my message says.

The Jews and the Law

¹⁷Some of you call yourselves Jews. You trust in the Law and take pride in God. ¹⁸By reading the Scriptures you learn how God wants you to behave, and you discover what is right. ¹⁹You are sure that you are a guide for the blind and a light for all who are in the dark. ²⁰And since there is knowledge and truth in God's Law, you think you can instruct fools and teach young people.

²¹But how can you teach others when you refuse to learn? You preach that it is wrong to steal. But do you steal? ²²You say people should be faithful in marriage. But are you faithful? You hate idols, yet you rob their temples. ²³You take pride in the Law, but you disobey the Law and bring shame to God. ²⁴It is just as the Scriptures tell us, "You have made foreigners say insulting things about God."

²⁵Being circumcised is worthwhile, if you obey the Law. But if you don't obey the Law, you are no better off than people who are not circumcised. ²⁶In fact, if they obey the Law, they are as good as anyone who is circumcised. ²⁷So everyone who obeys the Law, but has never been circumcised, will condemn you. Even though you are circumcised and have the Law, you still don't obey its teachings.

²⁸Just because you live like a Jew and are circumcised doesn't make you a real Jew. ²⁹To be a real Jew you must obey the Law. True circumcision is something that happens deep in your heart, not something done to your body. And besides, you should want praise from God and not from humans.

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What a powerful chapter! I pray that God will enlighten each of you as you read and reread that passage, because as I mentioned earlier, it is one of the foundational chapters for our walk with Christ and our witness to the lost.

Now let's consider the following questions:

1. Based on your reading for Romans Chapter 2, what is indicated regarding how many judges mankind will have, how many standards mankind will be judged by, and how many outcomes will occur?
 - a. ANSWER: Clearly, mankind will have but one judge, Jesus Christ, and he will judge by one standard, the Law; and only one of two outcomes will occur. "Eternal life to everyone who has patiently done what is good in the hope of receiving glory, honor and life that lasts forever." Or, "All who are wicked will be punished with trouble and suffering."
2. What does the chapter tell us about being Jewish? Are the Jewish people favored? I.e., will they receive favoritism from God because they are Jewish? Will we as Christians also be His favorites? Will we have stored up for us special treatment from God at judgment because we are "Christians"? What does the chapter tell us about God and favorites? (see verse 11)
 - a. ANSWER: The scripture tells us that God has no favorites; both the Jew and the Gentile will be judged the same using the same law applied to both. All of us will be judged—the lost, the Jew, and the Christian—using the same standard: the Law.
3. As you consider this chapter further, what do you believe to be its central truth or teaching?
 - a. ANSWER: It's not about deeds, thoughts, status, race, nor anything else; the central truth is that, in the end, God through his son Jesus is going to judge all of us using the same standard. There will be no excuses.
4. Do you think that Ephesians 2:8 may also shed some light on what the central truth of the chapter is? Based on Ephesians 2:8, what would you now say the central truth is?
 - a. ANSWER: This chapter makes it clear that choosing to reject God and his son Jesus will result in severe judgment. Anyone who rejects God's truth, His law, and His Holy Word will be severely punished.

5. In this chapter, Paul writes of three divine standards that God's judgment will be based on. List each of them, as cited in the scripture references below:
 - a. Romans 2:2-4
 - i. ANSWER: The standards are based on how we behave, our deeds, and our actions, toward God.
 - b. Romans 2:5-11
 - i. ANSWER: Those who do evil will be severely punished, and it will not matter if they are Jew or Gentile, since God does not play favorites.
 - c. Romans 2:12-16
 - i. ANSWER: He will judge our secret thoughts; everything will be revealed to Christ as he judges us, even our thoughts—not just our words and deeds.
6. What does John 5:22 tell us about God and judgment?
 - a. ANSWER: God has made Jesus the judge of everyone, not just the Jews, but everyone, everywhere; throughout the entire world Jesus will be the final judge.
7. In Romans 2:17-29, what is Paul trying to tell the Jews?
 - a. ANSWER: Just because you are a Jew, and you walk and talk and do good deeds like a Jew, this won't get you any favor with God when it comes time for Christ to judge us. You will be judged against the same standards and in the same way as the rest of the world. In particular, Paul is calling out their hypocrisy—preaching one thing and doing another, teaching one thing and living a different way; and in doing so, they bring shame to God.
8. Why would Paul's message in verses 17-29 above also be important to us—or to the lost around us—today? Why would, or should, we care today about these verses with respect to our Christian walk?
 - a. ANSWER: Of course these verses apply to us today as well. We cannot speak about Christ with a Hippocratic approach, saying one thing but doing another. We are followers of Christ, which means that we are to do all to glorify and honor him, and not do anything that would dishonor him, or cause others to fall away. We need to be aware of our role as a servant of Christ and honor him in all that we do, say, and think.

What a powerful chapter this is! (And equally-so will be Chapter 3 in our next lesson.) Chapter 2 tells us that it is what is in our heart that matters most. It's not the "doing"; it's the "believing" and the "living out" of our salvation that we will be judged on. Ephesians 2:8 tells us we do not get to heaven by doing good works; we can't earn our salvation. It is truly a free gift from God, given out of love.

We also clearly saw that with God, there are no "favorites". No one has a special "in" with God. We don't have special dispensations that allow us to behave, think, or act differently; or in a way that makes us better than everyone else, or gets us into heaven.

In the lessons that follow, we will see that God's chosen people, the Jews, have a special relationship with God; but as Paul teaches, they are not exempt from the Law, nor are they saved by it, nor by their "righteous" acts.

The same is true for any class or group of lost people. Acting in a specific way, disciplining their bodies into a certain ascetic lifestyle, adhering to special diets, or certain clothing requirements, or observing certain "holy" days—none of these things, including being a "good" person, gets anyone into heaven. None of that impresses God, nor atones for our sin; only Christ's sacrifice and resurrection, and God's grace, accomplishes that.

This lesson teaches us to live a life that glorifies God and His Son Jesus, to live humbly (not expecting "favors" from God), and to love the lost around us, as God loves us; teaching them that there is only one way, and that way is Christ.

May He richly bless you as you examine your walk more closely, and as you study His Holy Word with us this week.

In Christ,

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