

CONCERNING THE WAY

August 17, 2010

LESSON 109: PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS



No Human Can Escape God's Judgment

In all of chapter 2 and into chapter 3 Paul is going to continue to tell us what's wrong with humanity. We began to study it last week in chapter 1. It's not pretty, but we need to understand just how bad the situation is. Mankind is sick, and lost without God. **Chapter 2 is for all those who think that chapter 1 was not about them!**

In chapter 1, Paul painted a picture of the appalling condition of the world. The problem is that many people, when they read that section of scripture, whole-heartedly agree with what Paul says, but self-righteously believe themselves to be innocent. Paul knew that there would be those in his audience that would think that way, so now in chapter 2 he targets self-righteous people who think their morality will save them. When Paul talks about "all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" in 1:18, he's including not only debauched pagans, but also moralists. Moralists judge others for sin but are blind to their own sin. They only condemn themselves when they condemn others. People like this often live inwardly what others live outwardly. A moralist may not outwardly steal but inwardly will covet. A moralist may not outwardly commit adultery but in his heart may have problems with lust. Jesus considered actions and thoughts to be the same (Matthew 5:27-28, Mark 7:21-22). Also, 1 John 3:15 says that if you hate your brother you're guilty of murder. This is the background for what Paul will be speaking of here.

"The personal character of God's relations toward men, either in the matter of salvation or of damnation, is rapidly being forgotten by this generation. Yet, if God be God, He must be the Judge of All.

Now every creature stands in relation to God according to what God is. God cannot change. Daniel Webster, in answer to the question: "What is the greatest thought that ever entered your mind?" said, at once, "My responsibility to my Maker!" You must meet God, and that as He is, not as you might wish Him to be. If you have Christ, you have already met Him! If you have not Christ, you have still to face God in His infinite holiness, and that arrayed against you, at the Judgment Day." William Newell

Romans 2:1 Therefore you are without excuse, whoever you are, when you judge someone else. For on whatever grounds you judge another, you condemn yourself, because you who judge practice the same things.

A "moralist" is someone who is careful to live an outwardly moral life, and may spend a lot of time talking about what they do and don't do, all the while looking down on others who don't measure up to their standards.

We need to be careful with this verse. Paul is not saying that we shouldn't be discerning and speak out against sin. But his point is that we should never consider ourselves better people than lost people. Of course, we are better off, in that we are assured of eternal life instead of eternal judgment. But we should never be proud and boastful because we are believers. We have done nothing to boast of in ourselves, it has all been done by Jesus Christ, and we do not deserve anything that He has

given us.

Paul is saying we are all part of sinful humanity, saved and set apart only by the grace of God. We are still sinners saved by grace. He's also saying to be careful how you judge others, because you will be judged in the same way, which is also what Jesus said. Read Matthew 7:1-5

Matthew 7:1-5 "Do not judge so that you will not be judged. (2) For by the standard you judge you will be judged, and the measure you use will be the measure you receive. (3) Why do you see the speck in your brother's eye, but fail to see the beam of wood in your own? (4) Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye,' while there is a beam in your own? (5) You hypocrite! First remove the beam from your own eye, and then you can see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Jesus shows us in his incredible way of showing the truth how ridiculous it is to judge others. If you can picture this in your mind, it is really quite hilarious. Judging others exposes us as fools and all we do is condemn ourselves.

Romans 2:2 Now we know that God's judgment is in accordance with truth against those who practice such things.

Of course, God is the only one qualified to truly judge, because He is the only one who can judge in perfect truth, without partiality, and without sin in himself. See, that's the problem with us judging others. We like to think that our sins aren't as bad; in fact, we don't even consider them sins, especially if they're attitudes or thoughts. But God says they are just as bad as these sins Paul has been talking about in chapter 1.

"I don't do this and I don't do that, and I'm a good person". That kind of attitude just throws grace right out the window. Do you really think you are incapable of doing the things Paul spoke of in chapter 1? Paul is saying you better believe we can and we do those things. There but for the grace of God go I...

"God sees the facts, nay, the motives behind the facts, of the life of every creature. Of course, this whole second chapter, and the first part of the third, is meant by God, whose name is Love, to drive us out of our false notions of Himself and His judicial procedure, into the arms of our Redeemer, Christ; who has borne wrath, the wrath of God, as our Substitute. But whether you are brought to flee to Christ or not, you must face the facts: God is a God of judgment, and a God of truth." Newell

Romans 2:3-4 And do you think, whoever you are, when you judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself, that you will escape God's judgment? (4) Or do you have contempt for the wealth of his kindness, forbearance, and patience, and yet do not know that God's kindness leads you to repentance?

Basically a moralist thinks that God will judge others but not them. This is foolishness! In judging others, moralists have completely missed the purpose of God's goodness. It is to lead us to repentance, a reliance on Him, not ourselves. They don't realize that **they personally need God's mercy and kindness just as much as blatant sinners do!** People like this, after years of glossing over their own personal sin and guilt, have developed a pride that will not allow them to have a change of mind (repentance).

This is about moralists (which most of us are or have been at times), but Paul may be beginning to

speak to the Jews here. The Jews in Paul's day felt themselves to be above the Gentiles. They depended on the Law to save them, and their Jewish heritage. Jesus called the Jews that were living in the Holy Land, practicing Judaism, "an evil and adulterous generation" three times (Matthew 12:39, 16:4, Mark 8:38). In Luke 9:41 He calls the Jews an "unbelieving and perverse generation".

We as Christians are no different in our generation. We are comfortable going to our churches on Sunday listening to the message and singing the songs and then living our lives the rest of the week any old way we want to, and condemning all those evil unbelievers out there. **How we must constantly grieve and quench the Holy Spirit in our lives!**

We should all take verse 4 to heart. How we tend to take for granted God's kindness and patience with us! "Forebearance" means "holding back". He could be lowering the boom on all of us every time we commit sin, but He doesn't. He holds back, and is patient with us, and that kindness is meant to bring us to repentance. These are very convicting verses!

We should use our ability to judge right from wrong primarily on ourselves, not on others. That creates in us a deep thankfulness to God, because He has chosen to love us despite the reality that, next to His holiness, we are despicable.

"Every man is naturally blind to his own state and sins. Not unless mightily convinced by the Holy Ghost, can any man imagine God's dealing in justice with him!" Newell

Romans 2:5 But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath for yourselves in the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment is revealed!

Someday God's patience will run out, and His full wrath will be poured out. **A moralist has piled up wrath for himself because he refuses to repent.** Paul probably has in mind the self-righteous Jews in these verses, but they are also directed towards Christians today who are stubborn and unrepentant - sinful and/or self-righteous and self-pious but unrepentant. People who go to church and go through the church rituals and traditions, and very pious, but are hard hearted (stubbornness).

"The sum and substance of this letter is: to pull down, to pluck up and destroy all wisdom and righteousness of the flesh (i.e., of whatever importance they may be in the sight of men and even in our own eyes), no matter how heartily and sincerely they may be practiced, and to implant, establish, and make large the reality of sin (however unconscious we may be of its existence)." Martin Luther

"Remember, if the goodness of God toward you is not leading you to repentance, then every day, every hour, you live, drops another drop into the terrible "treasure" of indignation which will burst the great dam of God's long-suffering—in the great Day of Wrath, when God shall reveal His righteous judgment! (Of course, if you flee to Calvary, you will "not come into judgment" (John 5:24): for Judgment has already struck there!)" Newell

Romans 2:6-8 He will reward each one according to his works : (7) eternal life to those who by perseverance in good works seek glory and honor and immortality, (8) but wrath and anger to those who live in selfish ambition and do not obey the truth but follow unrighteousness.

Verse 6 is a quote of Psalm 62:12. Proverbs 24:12 says it, and Jesus says it also in Matthew 16:27. Keep in mind the context here, what Paul is talking about. He is not talking about Christ at all in any of

these verses yet, but about the lostness of people.

Paul is speaking of the lost here. At the final judgment, the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11-15), salvation will not be the issue. **This is a judgment to determine the degree of punishment for those who have never accepted Christ.** Paul is speaking of all who went their own way instead of following Christ. Like Paul said back in chapter 1, people are lost because they have rejected the God who is so clearly evident in nature. Unlike those of us who have trusted Christ for salvation, these people will be judged on the basis of what they did in their lives.

At the Judgment Seat of Christ, where only believers will appear, God will also reward us according to our good works (2 Corinthians 5:10). Again, salvation will not be the issue there because those people have already trusted Christ for forgiveness of their sins and for their eternal destination.

Is verse 7 saying that some will gain eternal life by their good deeds? Always pay attention to context. In this context Paul is setting up a hypothetical situation, not stating that salvation is by works. At the judgment, unbelievers will have already rejected Christ, so they will be judged based on what they have done in their lives. He's basically saying that if a person could go all the way through their lives doing good works and obeying the Law, without sin, then they would gain eternal life. But the clear witness of the Bible is that no one has ever done that (except Jesus Christ).

The bad news is in verse 8, that ALL of us at least sometimes live in selfish ambition and do not obey the truth, so we are under God's wrath. All of us sometimes only serve ourselves. That's why we need a Savior (whom Paul hasn't spoken of yet). By nature we are all children of wrath.

The good news for the believer is that faith in Christ is our "perseverance in good works" (verse 7). That is the only thing that will bring us "glory, honor, and immortality", that is, eternal life.

Romans 2:9-11 There will be affliction and distress on everyone who does evil, on the Jew first and also the Greek, (10) but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, for the Jew first and also the Greek. (11) For there is no partiality with God.

Paul sometimes uses "Greeks" to describe all non-Jews. Greeks were considered the highest form of human Gentile culture at the time. "Distress" in the Greek means "the straights", or "the narrows". God is going to put the lost in the vise. They won't be able to move to the left or the right.

Getting worn down by this yet? Paul isn't letting up. This is where the world is going. They are partying and buying and entertaining themselves all the way to hell. And it doesn't matter who you are – how rich you are, what religion you follow, what race you were born into, everyone will face judgment.

"It is a terrifying thought to earth's great,—but an infinitely comforting thought to every humble God-fearing soul,—that there is an impartial One, with no respect of persons, with whom they have to do!"
Newell

1 Corinthians 10:1-6 For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea, (2) and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, (3) and all ate the same spiritual food, (4) and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they were all drinking from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. (5) But God was not pleased with most of them, for they were cut down in the wilderness. (6) These things happened as

examples for us, so that we will not crave evil things as they did.

Paul reminds us in this passage in 1 Corinthians that believers can sin (“crave evil things”). **These Israelites were believers, but they were “cut down” in the wilderness.** Even though our salvation is assured because we belong to Christ, God will discipline us, sometimes harshly, in this life because of sin in our lives. These were believers that were destroyed (cut down) by God in the wilderness.

This is important. Paul is going to be speaking about what happened to the Jews, but we must not throw rocks at the Jews, because we are no better. Their failures are meant to be examples for us.

Romans 2:12 For all who have sinned apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.

Now Paul is going to come down directly on the Jews, because they are the ones that had the Law and were living self-righteously, thinking the Law would save them. Paul is saying that all people will die because of their sin – the Gentiles apart from the Law, and the Jews will be judged by the Law.

Romans 2:13 For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous before God, but those who do the law will be declared righteous.

Paul is not saying we can be saved by law-keeping. Reading the Mosaic Law was a regular part of each synagogue service, so that Jews were those who hear the Law. He is describing the state of the Jews here, saying it wasn't just the fact that they heard the Law that made them righteous, but only doers of the Law who would be declared righteous. Of course, the problem is, no one really kept the whole Law. The Jews thought they were better than Gentiles because they knew the Law. In reality they weren't, because they didn't obey the Law either. They just pretended that they were perfect. And many Christians today do the same thing.

Romans 2:14 For whenever the Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature the things required by the law, these who do not have the law are a law to themselves.

Lots of Gentiles live morally – keeping the Mosaic Law which they don't have. Not everyone is as depraved as they can be. Because this country was founded on Judeo-Christian principles from the Bible, most of us grew up learning to obey the law and be good people. We all know people who are upright, moral citizens, but not necessarily Christians. But does that save them? Keep reading...

Romans 2:15-16 They show that the work of the law is written in their hearts, as their conscience bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or else defend them, (16) on the day when God will judge the secrets of human hearts, according to my gospel through Christ Jesus.

So the lost can know right from wrong. Everyone has a conscience. Every person can do good things, which are like the Law (work of the Law). Everyone can accumulate knowledge about what is good or bad. Any unbeliever can come to the understanding that it is wrong to steal, apart from the Ten Commandments. There have been good things in history done by unbelieving Gentiles.

Will that help unbelievers on the Day of Judgment? It may lessen the severity of their punishment. But read verse 16 again, because you may have missed it. **Good works will not be the basis of whether you go to heaven or not.** It will be based on what? Whether or not you trusted Jesus Christ as Savior. If you have not trusted Christ, you will stand before Him at the Great White Throne

judgment and give an account of everything in your life, good and bad, and that's how you will be judged. If you did a lot of good in your life, it may lessen the punishment in hell, but if you rejected the way of escape that Christ provided, you won't go to heaven. We can't justify ourselves before God.

So Paul's point is that **the Gentile can do some good things even though he doesn't have the Law and the Jew can do bad things even though he does have the Law, but in the end, it doesn't matter. We're all in the same boat.**

"my gospel" – the gospel of Jesus Christ that was revealed to Paul by Jesus Himself (Romans 16:25, 2 Timothy 2:8)

Being moral does not make you righteous. They are not the same concept. God demands righteousness, not just morality. Since no one has the kind of righteousness God requires, **He deals with the moral and immoral in the same way. Both fall short (as Paul says later in Romans 3:23).** Of course, when we trust Christ, His righteousness is imputed to us. His righteousness is sufficient, nothing else will do.

Romans 2:17-18 But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast of your relationship to God (18) and know his will and approve the superior things because you receive instruction from the law,

Here it comes, this is what Paul has been building up to. He is speaking directly to the Jews who thought they were right with God, but were really lost. And this is a lesson to all of us, especially to those of us who grew up in the church, were raised in Christian families, listened to countless sermons, have been active in church ministries and activities. We had better check our attitudes, our spirit, and our intentions. **Are we trusting any of that, or are we trusting Christ?**

In case we haven't mentioned it before, Israelites who remained in Palestine or returned to it after the Babylonian captivity were designated as "Jews", which comes from the name "Judah", even though tribes other than Judah were included. Paul calls himself a "Jew" in Acts 21:39 but an "Israelite" in Romans 11:1 and "a Hebrew" in Philippians 3:5. All three refer to the same people, but technically, "Hebrew" is the racial name, "Israel" is the national name, and "Jew" is the religious name of the sons of Jacob.

Jews in Paul's time were raised to believe that they were righteous because they were born a Jew, they were circumcised, and they obeyed the Law. But just being a Jew did not guarantee them salvation, and none of them truly obeyed the whole Law.

Romans 2:19-20 and if you are convinced that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, (20) an educator of the senseless, a teacher of little children, because you have in the law the essential features of knowledge and of the truth —

To sum up 17-20, Paul is speaking about Jews who:

1. Rely on the Law – they put their confidence in the fact that God gave it to them
2. Boast of their relationship with God – they gloried in their covenant ties to God
3. Know His will – had an awareness of God's desires and plan
4. Approve the superior things – they set spiritually higher standards

5. Receive instruction from the Law – from the time of their youth they were taught regular lessons on the Law

Because of these things they believed they were righteous, and so they were able to fulfill four roles Paul mentions here –

1. Guides to the blind
2. Lights to those who are in darkness
3. Educators of the senseless
4. Teachers of little children

All four have to do with teaching the foolish Gentiles about God. So far, Jews reading this would have been shaking their heads in agreement with what Paul is saying.

Romans 2:21-22 therefore you who teach someone else, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? (22) You who tell others not to commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?

Whoops, now Paul lowers the boom. The Jews were only too happy to teach the Law to the Gentiles, but they were breaking those commandments themselves. They were “talking the talk, but not walking the walk”. Their lives did not back up their message.

Those of us who teach others, we have to continually ask ourselves, **are we living the way we teach others to live?** Of course we don’t walk perfectly. We don’t say everything right. We don’t always have the right attitude. All of us should constantly check ourselves.

We had better be careful when we tell someone else what to do or what not to do. If I talk against stealing, I had better make sure that I don’t have greed, materialism, or envy in my heart. If I counsel someone not to commit adultery, I had better make sure that I don’t have lust in my heart.

We’re not sure what Paul means by “rob temples” here. There was apparently something going on at that time, though, that his audience would have known about.

Romans 2:23-24 You who boast in the law dishonor God by transgressing the law! (24) For just as it is written, "the name of God is being blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

The Jews claimed to be righteous because they had the Law, but they didn’t keep it. Paul quotes Isaiah 52:5 here. The Jews were given the Law so that they could teach the whole world to know God, but they failed. The Gentiles saw how Jews claimed to know God but lived like they didn’t, and that caused them to blaspheme the God of the Jews. They should be seeking God because of the Jews!

The same thing could be said today about people who hear the word but don’t do it in our evangelical churches. Unbelievers blaspheme God because of our hypocritical behavior. **They can see no difference between us who claim to know Christ and those who don’t.** If I boast in the fact that I know the Bible and teach it, and then I break the Law, I dishonor God. In my Christian walk, if I stumble, people who know me could lose respect for Christianity and even curse God because of me! This is a terrible thing!

Romans 2:25 For circumcision has its value if you practice the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.

Circumcision was meant as a sign that the Jews were sanctified, or set apart for God. But it became a point of pride with the Jews. They looked down on the “uncircumcised dogs” (Gentiles). But if you break the Law, the circumcision becomes meaningless. This would have been a shocking thing for a Jew to read. You mean I’m no better than a Gentile? They thought that because they were circumcised, they had it made, they were favored by God. They belonged to God. Are you hearing anything we can be guilty of?

Paul is trying to get us to look carefully at what we say we are and make sure it matches up with what we do.

Romans 2:26-27 Therefore if the uncircumcised man obeys the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? (27) And will not the physically uncircumcised man who keeps the law judge you who, despite the written code and circumcision, transgress the law?

Keep in mind Paul is not speaking of justification in these verses, but explaining that the Jew is no better than the Gentile. If a Gentile obeyed the Law that would make him spiritually circumcised. And that Gentile would be able to judge the Jew who was physically circumcised but didn’t keep the Law.

Romans 2:28-29 For a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision something that is outward in the flesh, (29) but someone is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is of the heart by the Spirit and not by the written code. This person's praise is not from people but from God.

Paul just keeps blowing through Jewish misconceptions. He makes a huge leap here. This is a revelation! God does not look at the outward part of you or what you do outwardly. He looks at the heart. He’s speaking of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31). We’re not saved by keeping the Law! True circumcision is of the heart.

Paul was telling the Jews that the Law was killing them. They thought they were all right because they were physically a Jew, by birth and by circumcision, and because they had the Law. But they were lost and no better off than us Gentiles because they did not keep the Law.

But the New Covenant is internal, not external – spiritual, not physical. The Old Covenant brings death, the New Covenant brings life. These verses are so important. Paul repeats this in Romans 7:6.

Some people use this verse to say that being of the Hebrew race doesn’t mean anything anymore, that all believers in Christ are the new “Jews”. But Paul is not saying that at all. He is only saying that, to be truly Jewish, you must be (1) be born of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob (that is the circumcision of the flesh), and (2) you must be in tune with the God of Abraham (that is the inward, or spiritual circumcision), which is only possible through faith. The only true Jew (or “completed Jew, as some Messianic Jews prefer) is one who is born a Jew by race and a believer by God’s grace.

Some would argue, then, that Jews in the nation of Israel today, for the most part, are not true Jews, because the majority is in unbelief. And in a sense, they would be right. But the Old Testament prophets prophesied this, that the Jews would come back to the land in unbelief, and then when Christ

returns, they will turn to Him in belief. And so “all Israel” (those who have survived to that point) will be saved. This is why we pay attention to what is happening in Israel and support the nation’s right to exist and to defend herself. They are Jews by birth, physically circumcised, but most are not spiritually circumcised.

In a similar way, many people call themselves Christian. By that they may mean that they are not pagan, or of another religion, or that they belong to a certain church. But many people who call themselves Christian are not. Only true believers in Jesus Christ are truly Christians.

If we should apply this passage (17-29), must it not read something like this?—“If you bear the name of a Christian, and rest on having the gospel, and glory in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the gospel; and are confident that you yourself are a guide of the blind, having in the gospel the form of knowledge and of the truth”—Then would follow the searching questions of verses 21 and 22; for do we not know teachers that teach others, but refuse to follow their own teaching? And preachers that denounce stealing, but are accused by the world of being themselves money-grabbers? So it would read, “You who glory in the gospel, through your disobedience to the gospel, dishonor God? The name of God is blasphemed among non ‘church-members’ because of you!

Church-membership indeed profits if you are an obeyer of the gospel; but if you are a refuser of a gospel-walk, your ‘church-membership’ has become non ‘church-membership.’ If therefore a non ‘church-member’ obey the gospel, shall not his non ‘church-membership’ be reckoned for ‘church-membership’? And shall not non ‘church-members,’ if they obey the gospel, judge you, who with the letter and ‘church-membership’ are a refuser of a gospel-walk? For he is not a Christian who is one outwardly, nor is that ‘church-membership’ which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Christian who is one inwardly; and ‘church-membership’ is that of the heart, in the spirit not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God.” William Newell, modified for more modern English

Christianity is not based on an institution, or a ritual, or a tradition, or a denomination, but is based on what you personally do with Jesus Christ. **Paul here is taking religion and throwing it in the trash.** Christianity is about YOU and YOUR God, your relationship with Him.

These are sobering, convicting verses of scripture, even for those of us who know the Lord Jesus Christ. There is little conviction in the world today, and you won’t find these verses preached very often in the churches, because it’s too negative. Conviction has been replaced with secular psychology, which tells us that there’s nothing really wrong with us. God’s Word says there is something TERRIBLY wrong with us, and the only answer is Jesus Christ.

This section of Romans is called by many Paul’s “legal brief” against the human race, where he brings accusation and then a solution. But so far we’ve just seen the condemnation part of the legal brief. Next lesson we’ll study the great Romans chapter 3, where Paul begins to reveal the good news, the solution to mankind’s sickness. And do we need that good news!