

Romans 2:1-14 by Wayne Barber

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Romans 2:1-14: Man's Desperation for God's Good News, Part 3 by Dr. Wayne A. Barber

Righteousness always affects relationships. If you want to see the righteous character of God, look at how God treated man when man turned away from Him. Man exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for the worship of idols, of corruptible man. All man has ever done is reject God. Yet God, in His righteous character, did something absolutely overwhelming. He sent His Son to die for us. Unrighteousness is that wrong conduct that is always reflected in relationships. It's the way man treats man, the immoral way man treats man because he is irreverent towards God.

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who are suppressing [present tense] the truth about God in their unrighteousness." The word "men" there includes both the Gentile and the Jew. All men born into this world are born depraved because of Adam's sin. The depravity of man is the root of the problems of our society today. That is what the Apostle Paul is trying to get across. The need of all men is the good news of God: salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. The root of our problems is sin and the depravity of man.

Paul, like a lawyer, is beginning to present the case God has against all men in Romans 1:18-3:20. He talks about the Gentiles in

chapter 1 and the Jews in chapter 2. How do we know that? Well, look in verse 32 of chapter 1. The pronouns "they, them and their" are found all through chapter 1: "And although they knew the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them." You see a group of people, not only practicing these things, but approving others who also do them, sinning overtly. That is the Gentile world.

In chapter 2 Paul changes the pronoun from "them, those, their and they" to "you and yours." If you will follow "you" down through verse 17 Paul will tell you who he is talking about: "But if you bear the name 'Jew,' and rely upon the Law, and boast in God,..." He is talking about a different group. They are different in their character.

Look at 2:1: "Therefore you are without excuse, every man of you who passes judgment, for in that you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things." Here is one group approving and one group judging. But they are doing the same things. One is the Gentile group and the other is the group known as the Jews. For Paul to convince the Jewish audience here that the Gentiles have sinned would be easy. As a matter of fact, they sinned so openly anybody could see it.

Look back in 1:29. Paul says they were "filled with all unrighteousness." Unrighteousness, remember, is when we are unwilling to conform to the standard of God. God has a righteous standard. When a man gets saved, he realizes the way he has been living has been condemned by the standard God demands. Therefore, when he surrenders his heart, he is surrendering his will to say, "God, from now on, I want to live under Your standards. I am not going to live under mine anymore."

The Gentiles were filled with unrighteousness. They had come up with their own standard of what they called good and they are filled with unrighteousness: "...wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful..." They approved of people who lived that way. It was simple for Paul to convince the Jews that the Gentiles were sinners and needed the good news of Jesus Christ.

But Paul has a monumental task in chapter 2 of convincing the Jew that each one individually will have to stand under the judgment of God if the good news of God has not radically changed his life. The Jew mistakenly felt God would never judge them as individuals, only as a nation. Why?

The Jewish nation had a covenant with God that was made with Abraham and his seed after him. They felt secure in their salvation. They believed that as long as they kept the Law, the rite of circumcision, they were immune to God's judgment. As a nation, they were in covenant with God; they were the seed of Abraham.

They didn't understand that all that God had given to them was to lead them to repentance. Rather, they turned to a life of licentiousness and license. They thought they could live as they wanted. They judged the Gentiles as if the Gentiles were dogs. But they did not realize that the very rules they were judging the Gentiles by was turning right around and condemning them.

So the Apostle Paul is building his case like a lawyer. He wants them to know that the Jews are just as guilty as the Gentiles. The pious is just as guilty as the pagan. Even though their sin is subtler, it is the same sin, and God judges a lifestyle.

In chapter 2 Paul begins to build the case that God has against the Jews. It is going to be a real tough one. I believe there are five things Paul does in verses 1-16. First of all, in verse 1 he shows that the Jew who judges others is without excuse for what he himself is doing. You see, the whole key is how you live. Now the Jew has no leg to stand on. If he is going to judge somebody else and yet he himself is going to live that way, then what is he judging them by? That same standard will also judge him, and nobody can say a word about it. The Jew realizes that God must be just to do this.

"Without excuse" is the Greek word anapologetos, which means inexcusable, guilty as charged. What makes them guilty is the fact that their lifestyle is not different. They are judging the Gentiles who are very openly and overtly sinning, but they don't realize they are judged for doing the very same things by the same standard.

I want to show you something. What they are doing is called unrighteousness in verses 29-32, but verse 32 says, "those who practice such things are worthy of death." The word "death" there, thanatos, means separation from. In other words, they are facing an eternal separation from God because of their unrighteous way of living. But because they are in the Jewish nation, because they are in Israel, they think somehow they are immune from it. Paul says, "No way." Romans 2:2 says, "And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things." These Jews were condemning everybody, but they were living a lifestyle that was worthy of death and destined for judgment.

The word for "another" is the word heteros. There are two Greek words for "another." Allos, the word from which we get "ally," means another of the same kind. Jesus said, "When I go back to be with the Father, I will send another [allos] comforter to you." In other words, "one just like Me. My Spirit will come to live in you." That is a very important word, particularly in I Corinthians 12 when you are studying gifts. He interchanges those words.

The word heteros is the other word for "another." We get the word "heterosexual" and "heterogenous" from it. It means a different kind, the opposite kind. Paul is saying, "You Jews are judging another of a different kind. You are judging the Gentiles. They are overtly doing it and approving people who do it. But you don't realize you are not living to the standard by which you are judging them. Therefore, God's judgment is going to come upon you because these things you are practicing are worthy of death." They are destined for God's judgment. Each one living in the same manner will stand guilty before God, no matter what their heritage is.

Secondly, God judges according to truth. Look at verse 2: "And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things." A more literal translation would be: "And we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things." The word "truth" here certainly means truth, but it is more than that. Truth means those things that are without error.

God says, "I know what is true about you. I know what you are when you are not in your ceremony. I know what you are when you are not doing your religious thing. I am looking at your life." When God judges He doesn't judge by man's perception. He judges according to the facts, according to the truth. He holds up His standard in front of your life. And if Jesus Christ has not entered into your hearts, then you are going to be judged according to truth.

When Paul says, "those who practice such things," he includes the Jew, not just the Gentile. The Jews will be judged according to truth. Truth will be held up against the way they live. The Jews, as we said earlier, thought that they would be judged on some other basis. The Apostle Paul is trying to unwind that confusion. He is saying, "Listen, you are wrong. You are going to be judged individually like everyone else."

Thirdly, in verses 3-5 Paul shows that divine privilege and divine blessing do not excuse or exempt someone from God's judgment. This is where they messed up. The Jew was so privileged. He had the covenants, the law, the promises, the commands, everything. For some reason he thought that made him a privileged character. He took what he had, turned it around, didn't appreciate it and used it as a license to sin. God says, "Just because you have been divinely blessed; just because you have been divinely privileged does not exempt you from judgment. All that privilege, all of My goodness, was meant for something else."

Well, look at verse 3: "And do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment upon those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God?" Isn't it interesting, when you are guilty you are always looking for a way of escape. People are always looking for a way of escape, thinking that their good works, the privileges, the blessings that God has given them somehow will make them immune.

If you are acquitted, that is your way of escape. That is what the good news is! The good news is He came to do something you couldn't do. He paid a debt you owed, not that He owed. He paid a debt He didn't owe. And as a result of that, He acquits us, justifies us, just as if we had never sinned. He takes the law off our back. He fulfilled it. When we bow before Him in repentance and faith, He enters into our life, makes us a brand new creature and we are no longer condemned because now we are in Jesus Christ. That is our escape.

Paul says, "You Jews, you hide behind your works and your heritage. You don't understand that law is going to stand over you as truth and condemn your lifestyle one day. You will not escape." You may be saying, "God is not ever going to judge. He is a good God." You will not escape the judgment of God.

Look at verse 4: "Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" The word "think lightly" there, kataphroneo, is the word that means to have a low estimate of something. Look at the history of Israel and the long-suffering that God had with them and the patient way He put up with them. Moses called them a rebellious, stiff-necked people. God put up with them all of these centuries. All of the things He had given them, the Law, the standard, everything. He says, "Do you have such a low estimate of all of that, that for some reason you think you can sin licentiously and do what you want to do?"

Paul says, "God's kindness was meant to lead you to repentance. But you are not led to repentance. You have abused His kindness. You have taken it as some kind of privilege that you think you deserve. You have turned it around. Now you think you can live like you want and be exempt from His judgment." He says, "No, you are privileged because you were meant to proclaim the message of

the Messiah to the nations of this world. But you have rejected Him. You have treated it with such a low estimate."

Verse 5 shows their guilt before God: "But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." What a verse! The word "stubborn" is sklerotes. It means hardening. Think of sclerosis, hardening of the arteries.

The hardening doesn't happen overnight. It starts way back. A person says, "I am not going to live under God's standard." Light comes into your life and you don't respond to that light. Once you have not responded, it is easier not to respond to it a second time. After a while it is like the Jewish nation: they had all the truth, they had all the commandments, they had all the promises, but they were unwillingness to let it lead them to repentance. Instead they turned it around into licentiousness. They began to choke it out.

That can happen to us, too. We hear truth, and hear truth and hear truth. We are privileged to understand and know, and God says, "Hey, it is not in knowing or understanding. It is whether or not you respond." A person says, "I am not going to respond. I'll do it later." The next time he makes the same decision. It begins to harden inside of him and after a while he sears his conscience and there is just nothing there that God can do anymore.

Paul goes on to say, "because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself." It is as if he is saying, "It is your inability to repent—to change your mind—and your unwillingness to change your behavior to match the standard God commands, that are "storing up wrath." That is a scary thought. There is a day of wrath coming. We know that from Scripture. He mentions it here. That day of wrath is coming in the latter days and it is basically directed at Israel. Paul says, "You are storing up wrath for the day of wrath." Go back and read the book of Revelations. It is a very terrible day that is coming.

The storing up idea comes from the word "treasure." There is something that you would put aside so you could use it later on. But this time it is in a bad sense. Every time you are unwilling to conform to God's standard, you are storing up something and it is all going to come on you at once in the future.

He says it is also going to be at the "revelation of the righteous judgment of God." The word "revelation," apocolypse, never means an instant revelation. It always in Scripture means a progressive uncovering of something. The day of wrath is going to start that uncovering and it is going to get progressively worse. What he is telling the Jew is, "You had better wake up. There is a judgment day coming and God's wrath is already being revealed. You had better understand that. You are storing up wrath for yourself in that day." That is not a pleasant thought, is it?

The judgment of God is absolutely righteous because God knows the heart. He knows the lifestyle. He knows what you are hiding behind, the mask of religion. He knows what is going on in your life. If you have never received Jesus Christ, there is condemnation, there is judgment, there is wrath coming. And the longer you hear and reject, the more you build up and store wrath for yourself in that horrible day of judgment. God will hold those guilty who condemn others while they do the same things. God's judgment is according to truth. Special privilege and blessing does not exempt one from judgment.

Fourthly, God will judge works, not appearance. God is going to judge what you actually do, the deeds. Verse 6 says, "who [God] will render to every man according to his deeds." That phrase "according to" is the word kata. If you have \$100, you give according to that. What you give has to reflect what you have. Paul says, "This judgment is going to be according to your deeds." So the more a person has rejected light, the more a person refuses to bow under God's standard, the more that begins to build up and that is going to determine the judgment he is going to receive one day.

Paul is pointing to a time. He is warning them of an event that is coming. He is saying, "You have all this, and look how you are going to be judged. You are going to be judged according to works, not appearance." The retribution of eternity will be according to our works, our deeds, what we have done in the body. The wicked will be punished according to their works. God is a righteous God and if you can store up wrath, that is determining how much He is going to mete out to you in that day.

Finally in verses 7-10 Paul gives you a comparison of a righteous man. This is a man who has been willing to conform to God's standard. This is a man who is going to be on the right side. If you want to be judged, be on this side. He gives that analogy, and then he gives the contrast of somebody who is not, somebody who has rejected. They know a lot, but they are not willing to obey what they know. Verse 7 says, "to those who by perseverance [hypomone, the willingness to bear up under no matter how difficult it gets] in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life."

Now there are four things that mark a person as a righteous person. He seeks, first of all, for glory that God might be recognized in

what he does. Secondly, he seeks for honor, that God might be honored, and one day he might be honored when God looks at him and says, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." Next he seeks for immortality. He looks forward to the day when he will get his imperishable body, his incorruptible body, when he can be conformed in the image of Christ Jesus. Finally, he seeks for eternal life. Philippians 1:21 says, "For me to live is Christ." The word "live" means the essence of life. He says, "Jesus is my life" and seeks for this daily. He seeks to live in the abundance of what God has come to offer him in the good news of Jesus Christ. That is his main goal in life. He is not perfect, but in his heart, that is where he is focused, that is what he wants.

He is going to be judged a particular way. Look at verse 10. Here is his judgment: "glory [recognition] and honor [esteem] and peace to every man who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." God is not a respecter of persons, but if a Jew will bow down and conform and let the good news of Jesus Christ change his life, or if a Gentile will do that, then they will be rewarded accordingly. Which side would you rather be on? If I have to be on one side knowing every man shall be judged according to his deeds, that is the side I want to be on.

But then Paul gives the other side in verse 8: "but to those who are selfishly ambitious." The word "selfishly ambitious" is the Greek word that means mercenary. It is the same word for the word "hireling." It is a person who does what he does for profit. What does this have to do with Israel? It was profitable to be a Jew during that time. They could put taxes on the people and make a killing being a Jew. That is why such an indictment was against them. He says, "Here you are judging other people, and you are making money off of them. You are a mercenary. You are full of selfish ambition."

Paul goes on: "and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness." You are not willing to bow to God's standard. You take ten laws and make 613 out of them. You have your own standard. You think if you obey that God ought to appreciate you. You have made your own standard. You don't obey the truth. "Unrighteousness" means you are conforming to a standard that God condemns. You obey wrath and indignation. That is what you obey. You don't seem to understand that God says, "I have a standard you must surrender to, my righteous standard."

In verse 9 it shows you how they will be judged. "There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also to the Greek." That word "evil" has the idea that it harms other people, which goes back to that understanding of righteousness as a relational word. It always harms others.

Then verse 11 says, "For there is no partiality with God." In other words, how you live is going to mark you one day in judgment. If we are truly saved, if we have truly bowed before God, then His wrath is off of us and we have a different kind of judgment. If we have never bowed before His righteous standard, if we have never surrendered our will to Him, there is going to be a different kind of judgment and you have to measure it yourself. No man can do it for you. So the judgment of God will fall on those who are condemning others even while they are doing the same thing. It will be according to truth, what He knows they are trying to cover up. There will be no special privilege or blessing. God does not exempt one from judgment. God will judge according to works, not appearance.

Finally, the standard of judgment is according to how much light one has received. This is exciting. God is a just God. That is why in Romans 12 it says, "Vengeance is mine saith the Lord, I will repay." The word "vengeance" is not the word we think it is. It is ekdikesis, which means out of righteousness. God says, "Out of righteousness I will repay. I am the only one qualified to repay. I know what is going on and I will repay." No public opinions are going to be taken. He will repay. He is a just God. He will not penalize a Gentile for not having the law, nor will He excuse the Jews for having it. God knows exactly what is going on.

Verse 12 reads, "For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law." Paul appears to be talking about the Gentiles. Luke 12:47-48 talks about those who will receive many stripes and how others will receive less stripes because they did not have the benefit of knowing. Even though they will perish, their judgment will be just. Psalm 147:20 says that the Gentile nations of the world have never known "My precepts." So these without the Law seem to be the Gentiles.

Then he says, "and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law." Those are the Jews. God is a perfect Judge. God is a perfect, righteous Judge. He will judge according to how much light one has. This is the indictment to Israel. Look how much light they have and how much they have rejected.

Verses 14-15 say, "For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law...." That doesn't mean they conform to all the things of the Law. He says they have a moral code written on their hearts. It is not "the" Law. There is no definite article there. It is just law. Law is in a Gentile's heart and when a Gentile obeys that little bit of light that he has, he will have a moral code of ethics. He will have some kind of principles about him. You will see kindness and you will see qualities that the law God gave to the Jews demands. They will conform to it, but it is a law that God has written on every man's heart.

This goes back to chapter 1. They knew Him outwardly—His eternal power, but they also knew Him inwardly—His divine nature, because they have a conscious. They have a sense of what is right and what is wrong. It is built into every man. But they have exchanged what they knew about God and professed themselves to be wise. That is the indictment against them. But they are going to be judged according to the light that they have received. It is written on their hearts. Verse 14 is not saying they completely fulfill the law, but what they do, responding to that light, conforms to that which God required of the Jew.

Let me give it to you this way. It doesn't mean they are saved. He is not teaching that if a Gentile has this much light and responds to it, God will make an exception with him and bring him into the kingdom. That is not what he is saying. He is saying when He judges him, whatever judgment falls upon him will be determined by how much light he received and how much light he rejected.

In Hebrews 11, the hall of faith, Rahab is there. How much light did she have? Just a little. But she responded to it and ended up in Hebrews 11 and in James. How much did Abraham have? A whole lot! But you are going to be judged according to how much you've got and whether you reject it or respond to it. Now obviously, the Gentiles will still perish without Jesus Christ. But somehow, there is going to be a just retribution to them depending on the light they have received and the light they have rejected.

I want to ask you a question. How much light do you have? How much light do you understand and know? How much light have you received and how much light have you daily rejected? You had better take that to heart. God is a just God and He knows how much light. He was warning Israel, "Israel, you had better look out. The Gentiles will end up being your judge if you are not careful because of their responding to what Law God did put into their heart. They could end up judging you because you are not even living to all the knowledge you have of the righteous standard of God."

You had better listen to Romans 2. Because if you have the knowledge and you have rejected it, that is what is going to be your judgment one day. God is a just God. Don't ever say you weren't warned. If you know and you are not living it, you had better check it out to see whether or not you know Jesus Christ.