

## ROMANS 2:1-3:20 – The Unrighteousness of the Jews and the Guilt of All Humanity

1) Outline the passage. What are its key themes?

2) How does this passage fit within the broader argument of Romans? How does it address a possible response to 1:18-32?

### Knowing Without Obeying is Not Enough Because God Judges Impartially (Rom. 2:1-16)

3) Why do the Jews have no excuse?

#### ***Digging Deeper: Who is Paul addressing in these verses (vv. 1-16)?***

Paul does not specifically address the Jews until 2:17, and thus some think that the self-righteous moralist in general is being addressed in vv. 1-16. But most commentators see a critique on the Jews in these verses as well:

- The Jews would be most likely to criticize Gentiles for the behavior described in 1:18-32. The Jews would pass judgment (v. 1 – “every one of you who judges”) on the Gentiles and regard them as sinners.
- The attitude expressed in 2:3-4 fits Jews who would plead their covenantal relationship with God as protection against his wrath.
- The reference to the law in v. 12 also signals that the Jews are the particular object of Paul’s attention.

4) What does Paul warn the Jews of in vv. 2-5? What does Paul’s warning tell us about the spiritual condition of the Jews?

5) What is the overall principle of vv. 6-11? Why does Paul emphasize this?

***Digging Deeper: Does Paul teach in 2:7, 10 that some can obtain eternal life by doing good works?***

Two Interpretative Options (from T. Schreiner, *Romans*, 114):

1. Probably the dominant interpretation is that these verses are hypothetical. Eternal life would be given *if* one did good works and kept the law perfectly, but no one does the requisite good works, and thus all deserve judgment. The advantage of this interpretation is that it retains the focus of this section of Romans: judgment on all who sinned. It also neatly harmonizes with 3:19-20. No one can ever be justified by the works of the law since no one practices what the law commands.

OR

2. Paul's insistence elsewhere (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-11; 2 Cor. 5:10; Gal. 5:21) that works are necessary to enter the kingdom suggests that the similar theme here cannot be dismissed as hypothetical. Paul is speaking of real obedience that is rewarded on the last day—such obedience being the result of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, as Paul explains in 2:26-29. Verses 2:7, 10 therefore refer to *Christians*, who, through their union with Jesus Christ, are enabled to obey God by the power of the Holy Spirit.

**6) According to v. 12, how does God demonstrate his impartiality? Why is it not enough for the Jews to merely possess and know the law (v. 13)?**

**7) What implications and applications do these verses have for us?**

**Religious Privilege Without Obedience is Not Enough (Rom 2:17-3:8)**

*In vv. 17-29, Paul addresses two things that especially pointed to the Jews' special status: the law and circumcision. He states that the covenantal advantages they have in terms of the law and circumcision will avail only if they keep the law.*

**8) Why were the Jews boasting in the law? What was wrong with their boasting in the law (vv. 17-24)? What applications can we draw from here?**

**9) How were the Jews wrong to boast in their circumcision (vv. 25-29)? What applications can we draw from here?**

## 10) According to this passage, who is a “true Jew”? How is this significant?

### ***Digging Deeper: The Promise of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament***

The Holy Spirit is the gift of the new age prophesied in the OT (Joel 2:28-29; cf. Isa. 44:3; Ezek. 11:19; 36:26-27). The gift of the Spirit circumcises the heart and makes obedience to the law a reality. The OT shows that the circumcision of the heart is an eschatological reality (Lev. 26:41; Deut. 30:6; cf. Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4). When the heart is circumcised, then the law will be kept. One thinks here of Jeremiah's promise (Jer. 31:31-34) that in the new covenant God will write the law on the heart. Ezekiel says that obedience will become a reality when God takes out the heart of stone and puts his Spirit in his people (Ezek. 11:19-20; 36:26-27).

– Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*

### **How does Romans 2:1-3:8 speak to us today?**

*“In many of our contexts, the original groups of Jewish and Gentile Christians are not very relevant (because, sadly, there are so few Jewish Christians in most of our churches). But it does not take much thought to understand how **the mindset of religious privilege occurs in every church**. The church member from a Christian family, who has been brought up to know his Bible, who has perhaps some status in his church by association with significant people, who has been to the ‘right’ church as a student, whose lifestyle has been outwardly pretty respectable, whose life has perhaps been fairly straightforward, may be tempted to think he is just a bit superior to the new Christian who is clueless about his Bible, doesn’t know anybody who matters, has never been to a well-known church, and whose life is still pretty much a moral mess. In these terms there are plenty of ‘Jews’ and ‘Gentiles’ in all our churches.*

*At one level Paul’s aim is simple. He wants to close off the escape hatch by which the morally upright person tries to evade the fact that he or she can be right with God only and 100 per cent by free, unmerited grace, received empty-handed by faith. This is so offensive to human pride that **in every church evasions of grace spring up like weeds in a springtime garden**. Paul understands the deceitful attractiveness of a complacent false assurance and wants to expose it for the dangerous sham that it is... The moment we adopt a tabloid mentality of just being horrified by the terrible world around, we inevitably pull up the drawbridge to keep that terrible world out (little realizing that we also trap the same world inside our church). **Only sinners with hearts changed by grace alone will have the heart and humility to reach out to unforgiven sinners.**”*

--- Christopher Ash, *Teaching Romans*

**Everyone is Guilty; Everyone Needs the Gospel of Jesus Christ (3:9-20)**

**11) What does Paul conclude in 3:9? What is the basis of his conclusion? How serious is our sin plight?**

<b>Romans 3</b>	<b>OT Reference</b>
<b><i>Sinful Condition</i></b>	
v. 10, none is righteous	Ps. 14:3/53:3; Eccles. 7:20
v. 11a, no one understands	Ps. 14:2/53:2
v. 11b, no one seeks for God	Ps. 14:2/53:2
v. 12, all have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one	Ps. 14:3/53:3
<b><i>Sinful Speech (note progression from throat to tongue to lips)</i></b>	
v. 13a, b, their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive	Ps. 5:9
v. 13c, the venom of asps is under their lips	Ps. 140:3
v. 14, their mouth is full of curses and bitterness	Ps. 10:7
<b><i>Sinful Action</i></b>	
v. 15, their feet are swift to shed blood	Prov. 1:16/Isa. 59:7
v. 16, in their paths are ruin and misery	Isa. 59:7
v. 17, and the way of peace they have not known	Isa. 59:8
<b><i>Summary Statement</i></b>	
v. 18, there is no fear of God before their eyes	Ps. 36:1

**12) What are the implications of Paul's statement in 3:19-20?**

**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION**

1. In what ways are we like the Jews that Paul addresses in Romans 2:1-3:8? For instance, how might we be guilty of self-righteousness, pride, self-deception, and hypocrisy?

2. How can we stir up one another to the urgent need for daily repentance? How can we encourage one another daily so that none of us might be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin?

3. How is Bible knowledge both a valuable and yet a dangerous thing to have? How can we grow in Bible knowledge while avoiding the dangers of pride and hypocrisy?

4. In our lives, what do we boast in? Why? Where do we place our trust and confidence?

5. How might we take God's kindness and patience for granted?

6. Reflect on the OT passages quoted by Paul in Romans 3:10-18 and evaluate our hearts, speech and actions. How are we convicted of sin? How does this engender a greater gratitude for the gospel, as well as a deeper trust in Christ?

## **OUTLINE OF ROMANS**

### **I. Introduction (1:1-17)**

- A. Salutation (1:1-7)
- B. Thanksgiving (1:8-15)
- C. Statement of theme (1:16-17)

### **II. The Heart of the Gospel: Justification by Faith (1:18-4:25)**

- A. The universal reign of sin (1:18-3:20)
- B. Justification by faith (3:21-4:25)

### **III. The Assurance Provided by the Gospel: The Hope of Salvation (5:1-8:39)**

- A. The hope of glory (5:1-21)
- B. Freedom from bondage to sin (6:1-23)
- C. Freedom from bondage to the law (7:1-25)
- D. Assurance of eternal life in the Spirit (8:1-30)
- E. The believer's security celebrated (8:31-39)

### **IV. The Defense of the Gospel: The Problem of Israel (9:1-11:36)**

- A. Introduction: The tension between God's promises and Israel's plight (9:1-5)
- B. Defining the promise: (1) God's sovereign election (9:6-29)
- C. Understanding Israel's plight: Christ as the climax of salvation history (9:30-10:21)
- D. Summary: Israel, the "elect", and the "hardened" (11:1-10)
- E. Defining the promise (2): The future of Israel (11:11-32)
- F. Conclusion: Praise to God in light of his awesome plan (11:33-36)

### **V. The Transforming Power of the Gospel: Christian Conduct (12:1-15:13)**

- A. The heart of the matter: Total transformation (12:1-2)
- B. Humility and mutual service (12:3-8)
- C. Love and its manifestations (12:9-21)
- D. The Christian and secular rulers (13:1-7)
- E. Love and the law (13:8-10)
- F. Living in light of the day (13:11-14)
- G. A plea for unity (14:1-15:13)

### **VI. The Letter Closing (15:14-16:27)**

- A. Paul's ministry and travel plans (15:14-33)
- B. Greetings (16:1-23)
- C. Concluding doxology (16:25-27)