

## Romans 2:6-2:16      Relying on your own righteousness (part 2&3)

We need to be Berean Christians who examine the Scriptures every day, checking out what we hear (Acts 17:11), chewing it over for ourselves, so we can put it into practice. In this way we will grow spiritually ... rather than just being spoon fed.

In 2:1-16 Paul is building his argument to show that *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23). This is the foundation for accepting the good news that Jesus has died and rose again that we may have new life through Him.

Though it may be obvious that the mass of humanity is sinful (Romans 1:21-32), there are those who are self-righteous who would look down on these kind of 'sinners', considering themselves to be a cut above the rest. Paul tells them that they also will come into judgment, and he explores three aspects of God's judgment:

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| 2:1-5 (part 1)   | God's judgment is based on truth                  |
| 2:6-11 (part 2)  | God's judgment is impartial                       |
| 2:12-16 (part 3) | God's judgment is according to the light received |

### 2:6-11 (part 2)      God's judgment is impartial

The self-righteous are like the Pharisee in Jesus' parable (Luke 18:9-14). This kind of person has the spiritual gift of fault-finding, but is blind to their own shortcomings! But really they have a judgmental spirit. If we are honest there is something of the Pharisee in all of us. Paul reminds this kind of person, and us,

**Romans 2v6** *He will render to each one according to his work,*

and,

**Romans 2v11** *God shows no partiality.*

Being a human judge is complicated with many factors to consider. God has *all aspects* of every one of the 6-7billion people on the planet to consider in judging the world. So this is something only God can do. Romans 11:33 tells us that God's judgments are *unsearchable*! So it's best to leave it to Him! But we can be sure (unlike an unfair will of a deceased person, which can cause family tensions,) that His judgements will not only be fair, but they will be seen to be totally fair.

Paul describes two kinds of people (2:7-10):

**First**, *those who by patience and well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, he will give eternal life (v7); they will find glory, honour and peace (v10);*

**Second**, *those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness (v8), there will be tribulation and distress (v9).*

The main difference seems to be one of orientation: God-centred or self-centred. Paul is talking about final outcomes, so this doesn't mean that those seeking God won't go through temporary tribulation. In fact they will, which is why they need *patience in well-doing*.

But this looks a bit as if eternal life is based on merit. Even evangelical scholars wonder, and differ, about what Paul means here. Context can help: Paul's background was thoroughly Hebraic. Romans 2:6 is a quote from Psalm 62,

**Psalm 62:12** *To you, O Lord, belongs steadfast love. For you will render to a man according to his work.*

The Rabbis recognised grace in this verse: *The idea that a tenant of a field who pays his dues to the owner may ask for a reward is absurd. Where would the tenant be without the owner? This is the meaning of Psalms 62:12, "When You pay man his deserts, You perform an act of kindness." This is why righteous people never demand what they deserve, and always ask only for an act of kindness, a gift.* [Akeidat Yitzchak Gate 17, 36]

They saw that there must be grace in God's *rendering to each man according to his work*, because the idea of merit would contradict the place of human beings as tenants of God's field. This may be surprising for us because it challenges the idea that Judaism was a works based religion. Yet Paul could well have shared this Rabbinic interpretation, and therefore his use of Psalm 62:12 wouldn't have been an issue for him as it is for us. After all, Paul's message was,

**Rom 6:23a** *the gift of God is eternal life*

Yet the great difference that Paul preached was that this new life comes through Jesus the Messiah,

**Rom 6:23b** *in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

The self-righteous find this very hard to accept.

## 2:12-16 (part 3)

### God's judgment is according to the light received

It is here that we meet the word 'law' for the first time in Romans, a word which will feature prominently. So we need to understand what it means. Paul uses it,

- a. To refer to a spiritual principle (like a scientific principle). E.g. 'the law of sin and death'; the 'law of the Spirit of life' (Romans 8:2).
- b. To refer to the Mosaic Law, which is the more frequent use.

When we think of law we think of rules. But the Mosaic Law, the first 5 books of the Bible, called the Torah, or Pentateuch from the Greek, is more than rules. These books contain the accounts of creation; the stories of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; the Exodus and the giving of the commandments at Sinai; the tabernacle; the sacrificial system, and a lot more. 'Torah' properly refers to the 5 books of Moses, but it can be used more broadly to include the whole of the Old Testament. David said,

**Psalm 19:7** *The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul*

Yet how many people today think of the OT Scriptures as perfect? How many think of the OT Scriptures as reviving the soul? But God Himself said that the Torah was given,

**Deut 4:40** *That it may go well with you and with your children after you*

Jesus was emphatic,

**Matt 5:17** *Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets.*

Maybe Jesus foresaw the unfortunate trend in Christian theology that has often assumed that Jesus did come to abolish the Law. What did Paul have to say about the Law?

**Rom 7:12** *So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.*

We must have this in mind when reading Romans, or for that matter any of Paul's letters.

Now, to summarise 2:12-16 in my own words,

**v12** sin is sin, regardless of who you are e.g. murder is murder, sexual sin is sexual sin, theft is theft, etc. If you don't have the Torah you will perish in your sin. If you do have the Torah (i.e. the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles), you will still perish, but you will be judged by the greater light that you had.

**v13** Paul shows it's not those just listen (or attend church?) who are righteous before God, but those who do what the law requires, as we would say, *doers of the word* (James 1:22).

**v14** There are Gentiles who don't have the guidance of the Torah, but they may still do some of the things it requires! For example, they may be very generous and fulfil God's command to give to the poor.

**v15** they show that they have God's law written on their hearts, and their conscience guides them. When they follow their conscience and do right, their conscience excuses them and gives them peace; at other times if they don't follow their conscience their conflicting thoughts accuse them. I think most of us can identify with this!

**v16** The final judgment of all these things will take place *on that day*, when God judges the secrets of men's hearts according to the gospel.

So, for those who consider themselves righteous in God's sight (but aren't,) there will be a day of reckoning. But, as Paul will explain later in the letter, forgiveness is found in Jesus Christ for all who come to Him, for a righteousness from God is found in the gospel. This did not in some way cancel out the need for 'the Law', for it is still applicable to learn God's ways.

## Conclusion

This passage challenges those of us who know Christ to put our faith into practice, and not just listen! It also challenges us to live up to the light we have. We are all at different levels of understanding, and God's know that. Yet, in our generation we have unprecedented access to Bibles and other resources, especially with the advent of the Internet. We won't be able to say in our generation that we never heard!