

TUTORIAL
3.4

Finding Ourselves Judged

We discover that God's judgement is not partial. It is not biased, and so is inescapable. Paul explains these truths to a self-righteous audience who think that they can bypass God's judgement. This module was developed from lessons presented by Bible Teacher Scot Keen.

Introduction

Last time we explored the revelation of God's wrath towards the Gentiles as we saw in Romans 1:18-32. Paul said that mankind is without excuse because of God's clear and constant testimony through creation. Now Paul moves onto the impartiality of God's wrath towards Jews and Gentiles. In this tutorial we will be focusing on Romans 2:1-16.

Impartiality of God's wrath

Paul will not single out the Jews until verse seventeen in chapter two. But we can see Paul tiptoeing up on the Jews, saying things that refer to them, although he does not identify his audience until later on. We know that because Paul is addressing people who think they are better than the Gentiles, commonly referred to as barbarians. They assume that they will escape God's wrath because of their ethnicity. Paul is going to show them that they are basing their hopes on something that will not hold. He will show them that God's wrath is impartiality towards both Jews and Gentiles.

God's Judgment is inescapable

Paul begins chapter two by highlighting that God's judgement is inescapable. In verse one of chapter two Paul says, "Therefore, you have no excuse." Now that should strike us as an odd statement because, when Paul originally wrote Romans, there were no chapter divisions, and he only mentions the Gentiles. Let's go back to verse thirty-two in chapter one, "And although they know 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." He is talking about the Jews and he says, "Therefore, you are without an excuse." That really seems odd. How come they are accountable and with

an excuse when we are talking about what someone else did? Paul will explain that.

Paul says, "You have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things." We believe that Paul is addressing the Jews here. Paul says, "When you judge the Gentiles and say they shouldn't do that and you do the same thing, then by your own confession you are saying, 'I, too, deserve God's judgement'".

Let's use the story of King David and the prophet Nathan (in Samuel chapter two) as an example. David committed adultery with Bathsheba. God sent Nathan the Prophet to expose David's sin. Nathan tells a parable. He told a story about a poor man who owned a lamb, which happened to be precious to his family. Nathan also speaks of a rich man who, although having everything he wanted, stole the poor man's lamb for himself. David was so angry that he said, "That person deserves to die," to which Nathan responded, "*You* are that man because you took the wife of your Hittite to make her your own."

When David said that rich man deserved to die he was actually condemning himself. That is what the Jews are doing here in chapter two. They are pointing at the Gentiles and saying, "Those people deserve God's judgement," but they themselves are doing the same things. By their own admission, they too deserve God's judgement. In verse two Paul says, "And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things." He is getting them to agree with him here. He says, "We know. You and I know this. We know that God's judgement rightly falls on people who do these bad things." These self-righteous Jews are not connecting the dots that they too deserve God's wrath.

To give you another personal example, I had a mentor who worked with a tribal group in the Philippines called the Kalanguya Tribe. When my mentor was working with this group he asked, "Can you tell me what a good Kalanguya is like?" He wanted to find out about their standards of righteousness. They said, "Well, a good Kalanguya is good to his wife and he provides for his family. He's a hard worker. He helps other people. He shares." They gave their list of things a good Kalanguya would do. Then, he asked, "Can you show me somebody who's like that?" I kid you not, they said, "We don't have anybody like that in our village."

It is easy for mankind to describe what a good person should be like, but Paul is not concerned about Jews' ability to describe a good person. He wants them to see that they do not live up to the standard that they describe. In verse three Paul says, "Do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgement, and you do the same thing, do you suppose that you will escape the judgement of God?" Of course they did. They assumed that they would escape God's

judgement because they were Jews and not Gentiles. They assumed that even though they did the same things that others were doing, that they were somehow sheltered from God's wrath by simply having Abraham's DNA. Paul shows them that that simply is not the case.

In verse four Paul says, "Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" Because God is not executing judgement on the Jews in that moment, they assumed that all was well between them and God. Paul says, "No, the reason God is not judging you is in order to give you opportunity to repent." God holding back judgement does not equal God giving approval. God is giving the Jews an opportunity to come to faith in Christ.

God's judgement is unbiased

We are coming to what may be the most difficult, but perhaps also the most important, portion of Romans. In verse five Paul says, "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." The Jews were unwilling to repent. Every day that went by with wrath was building up. They would face that wrath on the day of God's judgement. Paul wants them to recognize that God's wrath is unbiased. He explains this further.

Now coming up is what is called, in literary terms, a chiasm. It is a literary device that was used by authors in the Greco-Roman world. These authors would frame a statement for the sake of emphasis. Some people call it a truth sandwich. Paul makes certain statements that seem to make no sense until we see them in our context.

In verse six Paul says that God will render to each person according to his deeds. He says in verse seven, "To those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation."

Can you see the problem with that? It sounds like Paul is saying that if you do good, you get immortality and eternal life. If you do good, then you will receive honor, peace and glory. It sounds like Paul is saying that you get eternal life by doing good works, but remember that Paul is talking to the self-righteous Jews, and he wants to shut the door on their self-righteous claims. Paul in essence is saying, "Okay. If you do good and only good, you'll get eternal life." He is saying, "Let's test your theory. If you think you can be good enough to earn God's salvation go ahead and try it, but be warned that if you cannot be good enough then there will be distress for every man who does evil and God will judge the Jew first."

Paul mirrors these statements in the chiasm. God judges all men equitably. All men will be judged impartially. Those who do good get eternal life. But those who do evil will suffer God's wrath. Paul wants to make it empathically clear to the Jews that everyone who does evil, whether they are Jews or Gentiles, will face the wrath of God.

The Jews thought that they would be treated with preference. Paul says yes, they will be treated with preference. The Jews will be judged first and the Gentiles after. Everyone will get exactly what they deserve. If the Jews have done evil, then they will be the first to be judged. He is taking away their hope of self-righteousness and he uses a literary device called a chiasm to do that.

God's judgement is based on deeds

Listen to Paul's next argument. He explains that God's judgement is based on deeds. The Jews had a problem with this. They thought that simply being Jews (possessing a higher moral standard than non-Jews) made them right with God. Paul is going to say, "No, it is not what you *know* or possess, but rather, what you *do* that will be judged."

Paul explains this in Romans 1:12-16. Notice that he says in verse twelve, "For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law." Those who sin without the Law are Gentiles. They do not have God's Word and will perish without the Law. In contrast, those who sin under the Law will be judged by the Law.

To give a personal illustration, years ago when I was studying Romans, I used a marker to cross out every additional phrase in the book of Romans in order to get the gist of what Paul was saying. I discovered something that I think is profound. Taking away the supporting phrases, *without the law* and *under the law* gave me, "All who have sinned will perish. All who have sinned will be judged." Paul communicated the exact same thing in the chiasm. There will be wrath for every person who does evil, to the Jews first, and also to the Gentiles.

Impartiality of God's wrath

Paul's point is that everyone who sins will be judged. That is something that the Jews had a problem with. Paul explains that God's wrath is impartial. In verse fourteen Paul says, "For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the law, these, not having the law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them."

This is a difficult section, but it is worth taking the time to understand. Paul says that the Gentiles instinctively follow the Law. Some read that and take it to mean that there must be groups of people out there who actually live up to God's standard. That is not what Paul is saying. When Paul says that they follow the Law and have it written on their hearts, he is simply saying that all mankind has standards.

That was an issue for the Jews. They had a standard, the Law, and they thought that possessing it made them right with God. Paul said, "No, it is not your possession of the standard that justifies you before God. The question is, do you live up to that standard?" Paul says that, in fact, everyone has a standard. The Gentiles instinctively have a standard. They show that the Law is written on their hearts. Possession of a standard is not what makes one right with God. The only way to be good enough is to actually live up to that standard. If not, Paul says that there is wrath for every person who does evil.

Paul is not saying here that people are justified by their deeds. He is trying to bring the Jews to the end of themselves by recognizing that there is nothing they can do. He is trying to show them the futility of trying to become right with God through good works. It is not a possession of a standard, or even an attempt at a standard, that makes you right with God. People can only be good enough if they live up to that standard. Paul says that God will judge the secrets of men through Jesus Christ. He ends with a note of seriousness that God, who looks at the heart and judges the secrets of men, will be the One to evaluate. This means that the Jew is left wanting before a Holy God.



DISCUSSION POINTS

Finding Ourselves Judged

1. Who is Paul focusing on in this section?
2. How do we know (from what Paul will later say in Romans) that Paul isn't teaching that men can actually be saved by doing good in verses 7-10?
3. What is Paul's point in verses 7-10?
4. What does Paul mean when he says that the Gentiles do instinctively the things in the law?