

ROMANS 2

Guilt of the Hypocrite

TO THE
ROMANS

God's Wrath on Unrighteousness

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and lawlessness of men, who by their lawlessness suppress the truth. ¹⁹ For what is known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For what can be seen about his attributes, namely, his eternal power

and his eternal power, called to be righteous, that they might be justified by the gospel of God, which he has revealed beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures,³ concerning his Son, who descended from David² according to the flesh⁴ and was declared to be the Son of God by power according to the Spirit of holiness

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We saw last time that mankind in his spiral downward into sin made three tragic exchanges:

- They *exchanged* the worship of God for idols.
- They *exchanged* the truth of God for a lie.
- And they *exchanged* natural relationships for unnatural ones.

In return, God “*gave them over*” three times to:

1. Sexual impurity
2. Shameful lusts
3. And a reprobate mind

Judgment on Hypocrites

Now Chapter 2 is going to focus on God’s indictment on all hypocrites regardless of race or religion, culture or creed. Both Jews and Gentiles are in the crosshairs of God’s judgment.

After focusing in Chapter 1 on the gross and flagrant sins of the openly ungodly, God turns His attention to “respectable” sinners who, thinking themselves better than others, fall into the same sins as those they pretend to despise.

God’s Righteous Judgement

Romans 2:1–2 NIV

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge [the other,] you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. ² Now we know that God’s judgment against those who do such things is based on truth.

Here Paul is addressing the Jews who approved of God's judgment on the pagan world. Unlike the Gentiles described in Romans 1:32 who *"not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them,"* (NIV) the Jews condemned them. In doing so, they revealed a knowledge of God, an awareness of sin, and an acknowledgement of His right to judge sin.

The Jews assumed that their approval of God's judgment upon the pagan world proved that they themselves were right with God. This should have been true, but it was not. The Jews were practicing the very things they judged in others.

Romans 2:3

So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment?

Paul is charging that by passing judgment of the Gentiles, the Jews condemned themselves, because they were doing the same things. Judging in others what we ourselves practice invites God's judgment. It treats with contempt the great kindness and patience of God.

Romans 2:3–4

So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? ⁴ Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?

Identifying a Hypocrite

Here we have key insight into the hypocrite: the sin of the hypocrite is that of being indignant at other people's shortcomings while being indulgent of his own.

The hypocrite bashes others for the very things he allows. He "finger-points" when four of his own fingers are pointing back at him. This is not saying that we

should not judge sin. It is saying that we should not harshly judge others for sins that thrive in our own backyard.

The essence of hypocrisy is to allow in ourselves what we condemn in others. The word **HYPOCRITE** comes from a word meaning “to act a part as on a stage.”

The hypocrite is a play actor. He puts on a show for the benefit of other people. But he never gets away with it with God. “Now we know that God’s judgment against those who do such things is based on truth” (v. 2).

No other person came under more scathing indictment from the Lord Jesus than the hypocrite. Fifteen times in Matthew’s gospel alone Jesus rebukes hypocrites!

The hypocrite forgets the times God’s goodness was extended to him: “Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness leads you toward repentance?” (v. 4)

The hypocrite’s memory is short when remembering all the times God had mercy on them in order to produce repentance. This is the essence of the hypocrisy of many religious folks who turn their nose up at the addicted, the crushed, the broken and the broke. They forget that God once also delivered them from the pit.

Paul continues in his indictment of the hypocrite, telling them what they face:

Romans 2:5–6

But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. ⁶ God “will give to each person according to what he has done.

The phrase, “storing up wrath” is very telling. It pictures the sinner storing away day by day a fresh deposit of wickedness for judgment in a coming day.

It is like making a fresh, daily deposit into the savings account of coming judgment against yourself!

Next, Paul describes the judgment of the hypocrite.

Judged According to Works

First, we see that the hypocrite is judged according to his works.

Romans 2:7–10

To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. ⁸ But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. ⁹ There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; ¹⁰ but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

This is one of the most difficult passages in Romans, because it gives the impression that salvation is earned by works, not grace. But we must bear in mind that this passage is dealing with the basis of God's judgment. In the Bible, judgment is executed according to our works; salvation is by faith.

When a person “persists in doing good,” and is seeking for “glory, honor, incorruption and eternal life in well-doing,” it attests to the presence of saving faith.

James 2:17–18

In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.

Saving faith is persevering faith. It moves its possessor to “persevere in doing good.”

And for the person of faith, the perfect, righteous life of Jesus Christ has already instantly been imputed, or “credited to his account” at the moment of salvation.

2 Corinthians 5:21

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Romans 4:8

Blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute (credit to his account) sin.

(We will look much more at the word “imputed” in Chapter 4.)

The wicked person or hypocrite will be judged by his deeds, not his faith. His deeds will be credited, or better put, debited to his account. As the song so accurately says:

*He paid a debt He did not owe; I owed a debt I could not pay,
I needed someone to wash my sins away.
But now I sing a brand new song, Amazing Grace.
Christ Jesus paid the debt that I could never pay.*

When the Blood of Christ was shed, it cancelled out the charges against us:

Colossians 2:13–15

When you were stuck in your old sin-dead life, you were incapable of responding to God. God brought you alive—right along with Christ! Think of it! All sins forgiven, the slate wiped clean, that old arrest warrant canceled and nailed to Christ’s cross. He stripped all the spiritual tyrants in the universe of their sham authority at the Cross and marched them naked through the streets.

When we place our faith in the finished work of Christ, two things happen immediately. First, all of our sin debt is cancelled. The charges legitimately leveled against us by Satan are dropped. Second, the perfect, righteous life of Christ is imputed to us, placed in our spiritual bank account.

But the hypocrite, the sinner who is living by works, will be judged according to their works. And at the judgment it will not matter who you are, how much money you had, or how many “good works” in your eyes you performed. If you have not placed your faith in the shed blood of Christ, your spiritual bank account will prove to be in bankruptcy. You are “yet in your sins.”

And God will judge accordingly, Paul writes, without showing special favor to anyone:

Romans 2:11

For God does not show favoritism.

The Light of the Word of God

Paul next talks about those who have possessed a level of light:

Romans 2:12–13

All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. ¹³ For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.

Those who have the Word of God have much more light than those without it. The possession of an open Bible greatly increases our ability to know God’s will. But light is light regardless of how dim or how bright it might happen to be.

If a person were lost in a dark cave, the least glimmer of light would draw him toward it. If he desired deliverance from the darkness, he would move toward the light with joy.

But if he had some guilt to hide he would not respond to the light, except to hide or flee from it, regardless of its dimness or brilliance. This is why Jesus said:

John 3:19–21

And ... judgment is based on this fact: God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. ²⁰ All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. ²¹ But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants.

If you really want to be free, the slightest glimmer of the dimmest light will pull you toward it. Paul says that doom awaits all who reject the light; but for those who have had a greater advantage, there is less excuse and greater guilt.

Educating the Conscience

Now, what the Gentiles had was not in written form, but it was etched into their conscience. It may not have been as clearly spelled out as what the Jews had been given by Moses, but they did have the basic moral concepts of God written into their consciousness by God. To those moral codes their conscience bore witness:

Romans 2:14–16

Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, ¹⁵ since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.

According to scripture, conscience is intended to be a goad, not a guide. The person who says “Just let conscience be your guide,” is mistaking the function of conscience. Conscience is God’s watchdog in the soul. When you do wrong, it barks. When you do right, it quietly sits in its house.

The conscience cannot act as guide because it can be seared, blunted, and silenced by years of sin. For instance, Paul talked about false teachers, “... whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron” (1 Timothy 4:2).

The conscience must be educated and monitored by the Word of God. If not, it can prove to be very elastic and flexible. Some people even dispense with it altogether. Others, like a coat, take it off or put it on depending on the circumstances.

Paul’s point is that conscience is a light, however dim, that bears witness to the fact that man lives in a moral universe and is ultimately answerable to God.

The Jews and the Law

Finally, Paul shows that authenticity is inward:

Romans 2:17–24

Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God; ¹⁸ if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; ¹⁹ if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, ²⁰ an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth— ²¹ you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? ²² You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³ You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? ²⁴ As it is written: “God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.

You preach and teach it, Paul says, but you are hypocrites that don't live it. Others see it and you are bringing a bad testimony.

True spiritual authenticity is only found within:

Romans 2:28–29

A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. ²⁹ No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God.