

## GOD JUDGES MORAL SINNERS AND JEWISH SINNERS

**PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.**

**Introduction:** This chapter is found within the larger context (1:18-3:20) in which Paul is demonstrating that the whole world is in need of salvation (3:9-10). The wrath of God is being revealed because humans have been rebellious to God's revelation of Himself (1:18). There are two major areas of human rebellion against God: (1) the Gentiles show their rebellion by an ungodly and immoral behavior, choosing false gods (1:19-32); and (2) the Jews show their rebellion by a hypocritical and proud behavior, claiming to know the true God, but denying His power in their lives (2:17-3:8). Between the Gentile idol worshippers and the Jewish "God worshippers" are the moralists. They are among Gentiles and Jews (2:1, 9-10), who try to be saved by their good works. Jesus said there will be people who will come to Him with three kinds of good works: they prophesied, cast out demons, and did miracles in His name. He will tell them "I never knew you" (Mt 7:21-23). He knew who they were, but He did not know them as believers; they did not trust in His power to save them. Instead they trusted in their religious works to save them. That is not sufficient to remove His judgment for their sin.

If a "moral" person could be good all his life and only commit one sin, he or she would be guilty of breaking the whole Law (Jam 2:10). Adam and Eve committed only one sin and that sin plunged the whole world into spiritual darkness. They broke God's command by one sin and had to be judged (Gen 3). The penalty was death. God warned them, but they did not believe Him. A "moral" law breaker will be judged like every other law breaker. The penalty is spiritual death (separation from God) and physical death (the spirit is separated from the body).

Paul gives four principles for His judgment of sinners. He will judge law breakers by the truth (2:2-5), by their works (2:6-10), by impartial treatment (2:11-15), and by Jesus Christ (2:16; cf Jn 5:22). They will stand before Christ seated on His great white throne (Rev 20:10, 12-15). Liars will be judged the same as murderers and will be cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev 21:8 gives a list of those that will suffer forever in fire). That is bad news, but there also is good news! God is merciful and He loves us. He has an offer that will save us from the Lake of Fire. This offer will be presented later in the notes for this chapter.

Having set forth these principles for judgment (2:2-16), Paul speaks directly to the Jew (2:17). The Jews had the mistaken notion that they were exempt from God's judgment for three reasons. They prided themselves that they were the recipients of God's written Law (2:17-24), that they alone had the divine rite of circumcision (2:25-27), and that they were the natural descendants of Abraham (2:28-29). Even so, they had broken God's Law (2:21-27) and were under God's wrath. This is a problem for all sinners, but it can be remedied through Jesus Christ (cf notes for 2:16).

### I. The Moral Person — 2:1-16

Romans 2:1-16 is open to three different interpretations. (1) Some relate it entirely to Gentiles to show that not all of them are as bad as those in 1:18-32, but will be judged guilty for "lesser acts of sin." (2) Others apply 2:1-3:8 to the Jews whom Paul is proving to be under condemnation and, hence, they are in need of God's righteousness through Jesus Christ. (3) Many commentators believe 2:1-16 refers to moral people in general, both Jews and Gentiles. They see this passage of Scripture as a bridge between the unrighteous Gentiles (1:18-32) and the self-righteous Jews (2:17-3:8). However, the moral person deserves God's wrath because of two reasons: first, he condemns himself (2:1); and second, God condemns him (2:2-16).

Even though the debate cannot be conclusively proven, there are five strong arguments from the context that neither the Gentile nor the Jew are exclusively in view here. It seems best to see that God has both the moral Gentile and the moral Jew in mind. First, "therefore" (2:1) is the conclusion of what Paul said of the Gentiles in the latter part of chapter one, so he is still speaking of Gentiles in 2:1-16, but probably not exclusively since he will deal with the Jews in 2:17-3:8. Second, The "man" (2:1) is not identified.

He might be a moral Gentile that did not fit the description of Gentiles in 1:18-32, or he might be a moral Jew, a kindly person, but not saved, that Paul will address beginning with 2:17. Better yet this "man" could represent a moral person from either group of people. Third, both Jews and Gentiles are named in 2:9-10. Fourth, Gentiles are mentioned by name as having a law from God written on their hearts (2:12-15) to which their conscience bears witness when they sin. This law convicts them of sin like the Law that God gave to the Jews, but it is not as certain or as clear-cut. Fifth, Jews are not explicitly addressed until 2:17, so it is not likely that they would be solely recognized as the "man" in 2:1. However, this debate is not denying the fact that every Jew or Gentile is a sinner.

### A. He Condemns Himself — 2:1

2:1 — "Therefore" - As stated above, Gentiles are being considered in Paul's argument. They may not appear as bad as the Gentiles in 1:18-32, but they are still condemned by a law which God wrote on their hearts. A moral Gentile or Jew will be condemned by God. Whenever a moral Gentile judges another person for some sin, either vocally or mentally, it shows he or she has a law for what is right or wrong. This is the standard by which he or she will be judged by God. A moral Jew will be judged by the Law given to them by Moses. Sinners cannot live up to their own laws, let alone God's Law. No matter how good sinners are in their own eyes or in the eyes of society, sooner or later they will condemn themselves by breaking the law given to them so that they deserve God's wrath.

### B. God Condemns Him — 2:2-16

God has four standards by which He will judge the world, including all moral persons, whether they are Gentile or Jew.

2:2-5 — First, God will judge sinners by the truth. Truth is established by God in His Word. It is expressed in His laws. It was seen in the life of Jesus, who is the truth. Truth is absolute and is not changed by culture. It is not changed by that which works for a while. It never changes. That which is true in the past is still true in the future. Right and wrong will never change. Since no one is able to live up to God's standard of right and wrong, all will be judged guilty by the truth.

2:3 — Moral people think they are exempt from God's judgment because they maintain an outward appearance of goodness. They judge others that do not live up to their standard, but inwardly do the same things as the persons they judge. They desire popularity, power, pleasure (to name a few), which replace their desire for God. They hate others, dwell on sexual immorality, are deceptive and covetous, refusing to share what they have with the needy or stealing what they want. They may not do all these things, but God knows the heart and will judge them by the truth.

2:4 — Moral people despise the riches of God's goodness and patience, ignoring His gracious gift of salvation. Instead they trust in their good works to save them. Truth will pronounce them guilty.

2:5 — Moral people are storing up wrath for themselves for the day of wrath (Rev 20:12-15) because they refuse to repent and believe the truth. Therefore, God will judge them by the truth.

2:6-10 — Second, God will judge every person by their works. God keeps a record of all the works that every person has done so His judgment will not be contested. Paul said that those who persevere in well doing will be given eternal life (2:7, 10). How can that be? Did Paul say that we are saved by our good works? If so, it is contrary to what he said later in 3:20: "therefore by the deeds of the Law there shall be no man justified." How can this apparent contradiction be resolved?

2:7, 10 — "Well doing" — In these verses Paul says unsaved people can do good, however, in 3:12 he quotes from Psalm 14 to prove that there is none that does good. Some agree with 2:7, 10 and believe there is a spark of divine in all people that needs to be fanned by love until it bursts into a flame of good works. This position believes there is no need for Jesus to die on the cross to pay for our sins, so it cannot be right. Others side with 3:12 and believe the flame that produces spiritual light and life has been quenched by their sin so they live in darkness and are spiritually dead. They cannot seek God nor produce any good works until God gives them faith to be saved.

However, the Ethiopian eunuch was seeking God before he was saved, making a long trip to Jerusalem to find Him without success. However, in his search for God, he bought the scroll of Isaiah, an expensive purchase in that day. On his way back to Ethiopia, he stopped to read chapter 53 that prophesied about our sins being placed on Jesus Christ to pay for them as a lamb led to be slaughtered. Philip was sent by the Spirit to find this man, answer his questions about this Scripture, and lead him to trust Christ for salvation (Acts 8:26-39). This man did seek the Lord before he was saved and found Him with Philip's help.

Cornelius is a classic story in Acts 10 about a devout Roman centurion that feared God with all in his house and prayed to Him always. He gave much in alms to poor people. His good works pleased God so He sent an angel to tell Cornelius to send for Peter, who would tell him and his household how to be saved (Acts 11:14). The Spirit led Luke to record these two stories in great detail to let us know that lost sinners can seek God and do some good works. Their response to the light God gave them allowed Him to give them more light until they were ready to receive Jesus, the Light of the world, and have eternal life. So, sinners cannot earn eternal life by good works, but people doing well in search of glory, honor and immortality can be led to Jesus, Who will give them eternal life.

2:8-9 — "Them that are contentious" – These are the unsaved that have no interest in well doing, but love their sins. Amnon, David's son, is like such persons. He forced Tamar, his half-sister, to have immoral sex, violated her purity, and then hated her. When he was intoxicated at a feast, Absalom had him killed in retaliation for his sexual crime against his sister. No doubt, God allowed Absalom to have Amnon killed and receive His indignation and wrath. Amnon may have suffered for his sins while he lived on earth, but all such sinners suffer tribulation and anguish in Hell.

2:11-15 — Third, God will judge without respect of persons. He will judge them by the law. The Jews have the law of Moses and the Gentiles have the work of the law written on their hearts. Either way it will accomplish God's purpose. When the Gentiles violate the obligations of the law written on their hearts, their conscience will accuse them of the wrong they did (2:14-15). Therefore, they will perish for their sins against their inward knowledge of the law in their hearts (2:12). Those Jews, who have the law of Moses, have no advantage over the Gentiles because a man is not righteous before God by hearing the Law, but only by doing it (2:13). Therefore, they will be judged by God's Law and found guilty (2:12; 3:19).

2:16 — Fourth, God will judge them by Jesus Christ. God has given His Son the authority to judge all sinners (Jn 5:22, 27). They may lie and deceive one another, but they cannot deceive Christ. He knows the truth. He knows those who professed to receive Him, but did it insincerely or without understanding. There are no secrets kept from Him. He also knows those who have truly received Him as their Savior. Only those who sincerely received Jesus will be justified (declared righteous).

His final judgment of sinners is described in Revelation 20:12-15. Sinners that did not receive Him as Savior will be taken from Hell to be judged at His great white throne. The books that contain all their deeds will be opened as evidence of what has been done by them publicly and secretly. These books will reveal every time they violated the law of God by their sin. Then the book of life will be opened to show that their names have not been recorded in it because they did not receive Jesus Christ as their Savior. When their names are not found in the book of life, their sins recorded in the books will be a testimony against them. Then Christ will pronounce them guilty and sentence them to the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:12-15).

Paul preached the judgment work of Christ, but what did he preach about the salvation work of Christ? He preached that Jesus Christ died to pay the penalty for the sins of everyone (1 Tim 2:6; Heb 2:9). Salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ's death on the cross and not by faith in any of our good works, which are like filthy rags (Eph 2:8-9; Isa 64:6). He paid the full penalty for our sins by shedding His sinless blood to blot out our sins. God accepted His Son's payment for our sins and declared us to be righteous (3:28). Then God raised His Son to life three days after His death. Since we are in Christ when we

received Him as our Savior, we died with Him, were buried with Him, and were raised with Him to a new life (2 Cor 5:17). Our new life is eternal; it will never end (Jn 5:24). It is powerful; it will enable us to conquer any sin in our life (Phil 4:13). It will be sinless; it will be like Jesus' life (1 Jn 3:2).

## **II. The Religious Jew — 2:17-29**

The religious Jew (as well as the religious Gentile) is unable to escape the wrath of God through his or her religion. Only the righteousness of God can rescue a person from the wrath of God. The basis of religion is faith in human works; the basis of God's righteousness is faith in Jesus Christ's work.

### **A. The Jews Misunderstood the Significance of the Law — 2:17-24**

#### **1. Their privileges from the law — 2:17-20**

2:17 — Paul pointed out the privileges of the Jews because they possessed the Law of God. They had a special revelation of God in the Law that other people did not have. They were given an exalted position in God's plan (Ex 19:6; Deut 10:15; Isa 43:20-21), but it led to their sin of pride. Paul's message to the Jews showed them that their possession of the Law could not give them a special relationship with God when they did not practice His Law. Instead of being consecrated by God's Law they would be condemned by it for not practicing it when they taught it to others (2:21-24).

2:18 — Through their instruction in the Law, they were aware of God's will and could discern between right and wrong.

2:19-20 — The Jews could have been a blessing to the impoverished people if they had been obedient to the Law. Paul gave a list of some blessings they could have given needy people.

a. "A guide of the blind" — They could have been a guide to the spiritually blind. Physical blindness became the symbol of intellectual and spiritual blindness (Isa 42:17; 56:10; Rom 11:7; 2 Cor 4:4). Paul implied that these Jews were blind guides through their disobedience to the Law (Mt 15:14; 23:16-24).

b. "A light of them which are in darkness" — They were appointed by God to be the light for the Gentiles (cp. Mal 1:11; Isa 42:6). If Israel truly had been a spiritual people, the Gentiles would have been saved through their testimony, instead they became a curse to them (Mt 23:15).

c. "An instructor of the foolish" — The Jews could have educated the ignorant and untrained Gentiles in spiritual concepts from the Law of God, if they had obeyed it.

d. "A teacher of babes" — The Jews were to take their converts (proselytes) and initiate them into the full knowledge of truth as a teacher. They could have lived up to it because they had the form (outline) of the knowledge and truth in the Law. In reality, Paul is saying, "You Jews do not live up to your claims."

#### **2. Their abuses of the Law — 2:21-24**

2:21-24 — Paul revealed the sin of the Jews in that they were inconsistent with the knowledge and claims they made. Three areas of sin are singled out: theft, adultery, and idolatry. Through their disobedience to the Law in which they boasted, the Jews dishonored God's name. The Gentiles blasphemed the name of God because they looked at the Jews as God's representatives. They ascribed the wickedness of the Jews to their God.

In summary, the religious Jew rested in the Law as his ticket to Heaven. He claimed that the Lord was His God and he knew His will because he was instructed in the Law of God (2:17-18). Furthermore, he felt superior to those without the Law because he was a teacher of the truths in the Law (2:19-20). However, his superiority as a teacher was invalidated by his practice. He was a law breaker (2:21-22). Furthermore, his special privileges as a possessor of the Law also were nullified by his law breaking.

(2:23). His sinful conduct had dishonored God and had caused the Gentiles to blaspheme His name (2:23-24). Therefore, his religious knowledge profited him nothing.

It is not the knowledge of God's Word, but obedience to it that counts with God. The first step of obedience is to receive Jesus Christ as Savior by claiming His propitiatory sacrifice. The second step of obedience is to serve Jesus Christ by witnessing using His resurrection power.

### **B. The Jews Misunderstood the Significance of Circumcision — 2:25-27**

2:25-27 — Paul then indicated that their trust in circumcision for salvation would avail nothing without keeping the whole Law. Since no one could keep the whole Law, circumcision never saved anyone. First, circumcision was a sign of Abraham's faith in God's promise of a son which was necessary to fulfill His covenant with him. Abraham's faith in God was counted to him for righteousness (15:7). He was circumcised after he believed God's promise (Gen 17:11). Second, circumcision for all the male seed of Abraham was a sign that they are in the covenant that God made with Abraham. Their baby boys were circumcised on the eighth day of their life. However, Gentiles did not circumcise babies, but they had faith in God that produced children who were pleasing to God. Their faith in God avoided the self-exaltation characteristic of the Jews.

Many church leaders believe baptism replaced circumcision. Since they erroneously believed that circumcision was necessary for salvation, they taught that baptism is necessary for salvation. Scripture teaches that salvation is only by personal faith in Jesus Christ without works of Law (Eph 2:8-9). Just as circumcision could not save the Jews, baptism cannot save the Gentile (or Jew). A person must not trust in the religious rites of a church or any religious organization because they cannot help anyone escape the wrath of God in the day of judgment.

### **C. The Jews Misunderstood the Significance of Their Race — 2:28-29**

2:28-29 — Paul gets to the heart of the Jews' problem here and discloses a spiritual vacuum in their lives. The religious Jews were confident that their Jewish heritage gave them special access to God's favor. They prided themselves as descendants of Abraham (cp. John the Baptist's parallel confrontation - Mt 3:9; Jn 8:33, 39). Paul delineates between physical and spiritual Jews. Spiritual Jews have had a circumcision of their hearts. The sins of the flesh are cut away by faith in Christ. He warned the Jews that God is not so much concerned with their outward appearance as He is with their inward condition (2:28). True Jews do not merely conform to external standards (cp. Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4; 9:26; Ezk 44:7). They trust in Christ to cut (circumcise) their sins from their hearts so that they are clean. False Jews refuse to put their faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, they are not children of God or of Abraham, but rather, children of Satan (Jn 8:32-44). Spiritual Jews will be praised by God and will not exalt themselves, which was the sin of most Jews. Spiritual Jews are not concerned about the praise of men, but rather, they desire the praise of God (2:29).

Sinners must not trust in the heritage of fine Christian parents to give them acceptance with God. They must not trust in their excellent Bible training in order to make peace with God. Trusting in their baptism will disappoint them on judgment day. The only way to remove their sins is to be cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ (1 Pet 2:24; 1 Jn 1:7). They must seek the Lord while He may be found, call on Him while He is near (Isa 55:6). Only then can they escape the wrath of God.

Only those who have received Jesus Christ as Savior have satisfied God's holy demands; all other sinners will come short of God's standard for righteousness (3:22-23). God shows no respect of persons for judgment or for salvation. Only those who have received Jesus Christ as their Savior will be saved from God's wrath.