

THE ROAD OF THE RIGHTEOUS

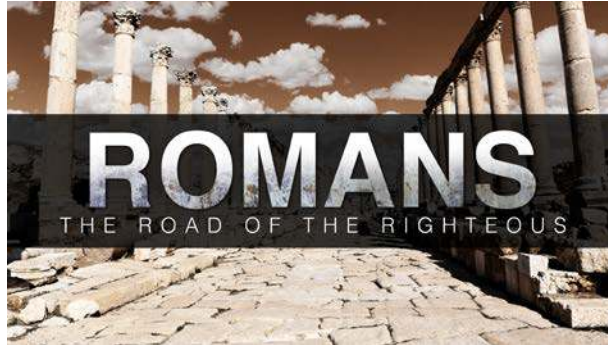
Expositional Study Of Romans

Romans 2:1-11

Written By

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The Pharisees were some of the finest men their nation ever produced. They were well kept, kind, knowledgeable in the things of God, faithful and worship attendance, skilled debaters on religious matters, men of prayer, and obedient to the law of God is revealed in the Old Testament Pentateuch. Daily they looked for converts, weekly they fasted to show how serious they were with their prayers, and they were zealously committed to making sure other people knew God and obeyed him, no matter what.

Their very name reveals the essence of what they were about, a Pharisee, a translation of the Hebrew Chasidim, means “the pious ones.” They believed piety or holiness came directly from one's external obedience to the Oral Law coupled with strict observance of the written Law of Moses. While the written Law had Ten Commandments and 613 additional commandments, the Oral Law, which they believed God also gave to Moses on Mount Sinai, had thousands of laws designed to help spiritual Jews secure holiness through their perpetual observance.

As such, the Pharisees, the religious leaders of the day, placed a premium on outer performance, while downplaying or paying little attention to inner performance before God. Their misplaced and misguided measurement of spirituality is forever inscribed on the pages of Holy Scripture in the story of the Pharisee and the tax-man.

¹⁰Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, and the other a tax-gatherer. ¹¹The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself, 'God, I thank Thee

that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer. ¹² I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get. ¹³ But the tax-gatherer, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted.' (Lk. 18).

Do you see the prideful, judgmental hypocrisy? It explodes all over the parable. Externally, the Pharisee feels spiritually good about himself as he prays to God. And as he has one eye open looking with disgust at the tax man next to him, he is uber thankful he is not a foul, godless, impious sinner like this poor, lost soul. Unfortunately, the Pharisee never once thought that his interior pride was just as big a sin before a holy God as the tax man's greedy and deceptive behavior. He couldn't (or wouldn't) see it because he was too caught up with his spiritual piety and performance. One man, however, left that temple service spiritually forgiven before an all-seeing God, while the other remained in his sin. The righteous man, contrary to what the culture thought based on externally observations, was not the Pharisees but the tax man who humbly judged his interior life correctly. What a reversal.

Why do we talk about this at this juncture in our study of Romans? Because in chapter 2 Paul introduces us to the pious Jewish moralist who has been with him lock-step through his whole discussion in chapter one about the vile wickedness of the Gentiles around him. Anticipating them "Amening" him every time he said, "And God gave them up," Paul turns in verse one of chapter two and poses and answers a most penetrating and convicting question.

How Does God Respond To Moral/Religious People Who Appear Spiritual? (Rom. 2:1-11)

God gives a five-fold response to the person who feels they are spiritually good based on their outer behavior, but who have failed to come to terms with the person and work of Jesus Christ. In other words, Paul addresses the upstanding moral and/or religious person who, for various reasons, rejects the gospel of God (Rom. 1:16), while opting to place their eternal fate in their adherence to external rules and regulations they created, or God created, or a combination of both. From verse 17, it is quite clear Paul has his Jewish brethren in mind, but the concepts he develops certainly apply to Gentiles too. We will cover four of Paul's comments in this study, leaving the fifth for our next lesson.

With verse one, Paul gives the Jewish moralist his first sober spiritual warning.

God Supplies The Reason For Divine Judgment (Rom. 2:1)

The opening conjunction, "therefore," *dio* (Διὸ),¹ gives us an additional reason for the wrath of God first mentioned in Romans 1:18.

¹ Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick William Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 250, **διὸ** inferential conjunction (δι' ὅ; s. B-D-F §451, 5) (Heraclitus, Thu.+) **therefore, for this reason** Mt 27:8; Mk 5:33 v.l.; Lk 7:7; Ac 15:19; 20:31; 25:26; 26:3; 27:25, 34; Ro 1:24; 2:1; 13:5 (RBultmann, TLZ 72, '47, 200 would omit the two last verses as glosses); Hb 3:7, 10; B 4:9; 1 Cl 7:2; 9:1; AcPlCor 1:16 al. διὸ καί (B-D-F §442, 12; 451, 5) *therefore ... also*, denoting that the inference is self-evident (Jos., Ant. 19, 294) Lk 1:35; Ac 10:29; 24:26; Ro 4:22; 15:22; 2 Cor 1:20; 5:9;

¹Therefore you are without excuse,

Hold it right there. Let's ask a key hermeneutical question. Who is the "you?" He is the pious Jew who feels spiritually safe and secure because of his Jewish heritage wedded to his loyal observance of everything Jewish . . . from the observance of Passover to the reciting of the correct traditional prayers. Paul, who used to be one of these self-deceived, self-righteous people, identifies them in verses 9 through 10 and verse 17.

What does Paul tell them? He caused many jaws to drop when he says that they, of all people, are "without excuse" before a holy God. Why are *they* without excuse? Because if anyone should have known God, God's ways, and come to know the Messiah based on all the Old Testament prophesies, it should have been the Jews. But they hid behind their Jewish heritage, Jewish customs, Jewish rituals, and love, respect, and observance of the Mosaic Law. And they had done this for so long and so well they would never dream they were under God's judgment. After all, they, for the most part, did not sink to the depths of the sins Paul just mentioned in verses 18-32. No one summarizes the Jewish historical thinking at this time better than William Barclay when he observes,

They thought that they occupied a privileged position. God might be the judge of the Gentiles, but he was the special protector of the Jews. Here, Paul is pointing out forcibly to the Jews that they are just as much sinners as the Gentiles and that, when they are condemning the Gentiles, they are condemning themselves. They will be judged not on their racial heritage but by the kind of lives that they live. The Jews always considered themselves in a specially privileged position with God. 'God', they said, 'loves Israel alone of all the nations of the earth.' 'God will judge the Gentiles with one measure and the Jews with another.' 'All Israelites will have part in the world to come.' 'Abraham sits beside the gates of hell and does not permit any wicked Israelite to go through.'²

Paul, who used to think like this, definitively and emphatically says this is just not the case. If they had not yet trusted Christ as the Messiah (Rom. 10:9), they, despite their bloodline and performance stood without excuse before God.

Why were good, nice, Jewish moralists, highly ethical people just as guilty before God as the vile sinners mentioned in Romans 1:18-32? Paul gives them the spine-stiffening, soul-searching answer in the latter part of the first verse:

. . . every man *of you* who passes judgment, for in that you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.

Makes you want to take a big, deep gulp, doesn't it? When a moral religionist passes critical judgment upon unethical, sinfully soiled people he has, in fact, just judged and condemned himself for in God's all-knowing mind the person in question is just as guilty. Why? They are guilty

¹Phil 2:9; AcPlCor 2:8 al. P⁷² reads δι' οἱ, w. ref. to Christ 2 Pt 1:12.—EMolland, Διο: Serta Rudbergiana '31, 43–52. See διότι 2.—M-M.

²William Barclay, *The Letter to the Romans*, 3rd ed. fully rev. & updated., The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 48.

because they have conveniently watered down God's method of measurement. They have erroneously and pridefully concluded that they are not guilty of being sexually compromised, murderers, evil-minded, haters of God and the like. No. They are spiritually fine because of their bloodline and because of their external observance of the dictates of the Law of Moses.

Their standard of measurement for whether they committed the sins mentioned in Romans 1 was, as I say, watered down. I know this to be the case because Christ addressed the issue in His first sermon, the Sermon on the Mount. Repeatedly Jesus says on a number of highly practical subjects, "You have heard" (or been taught, Matt. 5:21, 27, 33, 38, 43), but "I say unto you." They said murder was the act, while Jesus said, to God, it is equivalent to the inner feeling of hatred toward someone (Matt. 5:21ff). They said adultery was when you had a relationship with someone other than your spouse. He said it was equivalent to inner lust for someone other than your spouse (Matt. 5:27ff). They said to give your alms so everyone could see your commitment. He said to make it so secretive and private it would be as if your left hand didn't know what your right hand was doing (Matt. 6:1ff). Based on this lofty form of measurement, people who felt saintly immediately saw themselves as sinners in need of a Savior.

Paul's observation should be well-taken. When your standard of measuring your moral and spiritual standing is selfishly skewed, you condemn yourself the minute you, like the Pharisee, smugly and arrogantly thank God you are not like the sick sinners around you. Reading through *The Watchtower* magazine the other day, I came across an interesting article titled *At Which Table Are You Feeding?*³ The article warns Jehovah's Witnesses to steer clear of apostate Jehovah's Witnesses who were partaking of false doctrine at the table of demons. What table might this be? The table of Christendom. Commenting on the activity of the apostate, the magazine cautions, "To what have the apostates returned? In many cases they have reentered the darkness of Christendom and its doctrines such as the belief that all Christians go to heaven."⁴ They go on to counsel their members to disregard this vile teaching and to make sure they stick close with the teaching of the anointed organization.

Do you see the false standard of measurement? The Jehovah's Witness castigates the Church for espousing the dangerous false doctrine of teaching all repentant sinners go to heaven. I don't know about you, but you cannot read through the NT and not encounter this wonderful promise EVERYWHERE (John 3:16; 5:23-24; 14:1-6). They have modified what God says on many pivotal doctrines so they can feel good about how they measure their spirituality. Like the Pharisee they are saying, "We are so glad we are not like those misled Christians," when, in fact, they are the ones who are misled by false teaching, especially regarding the person and work of Jesus, the God-man and the Christ.

Our world is overrun with ethical religionists and just plain ethical people who feel they are so far above and beyond the truly unethical and irreligious around them. Our world is full of people who, by their standard or measurement don't feel they, of all people, are all that bad. What they fail, however, to realize is if their lives are not covered and cleansed by the blood of the Jesus, the God-man who bore our sin and rose the third day victorious over sin and death, then all of their criticism of others is nothing more than condemnation of their souls. The author of Hebrews speaks openly about the power of Christ's blood:

³*The Watchtower*, July 1, 1994.

⁴*Ibid.*, 12.

²⁴ For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a *mere* copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; ²⁵ nor was it that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood not his own. ²⁶ Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself (Heb. 9).

Those whose lives are not covered by Christ's blood are then moment by moment open to facing His condemnation because they hypocritically criticize others for the very sins they are committing. Ironic, but so true. Sinners are quite skilled at minimizing the sin in their lives while amplifying sin in the lives of others. If you don't believe me, then pay stricter attention to the evening news and what goes on around here in D.C. with politics.

On Judgment Day what are the ethical religionist, the finely dressed moralists going to hear from God? They will hear a resounding and reverberating, "You are without excuse for you were a sinner right along with everyone else, when you should have come to Me with your sin problem."

What about you? Have you lowered God's standard of measurement for true spirituality? Have you lowered His standards for what constitutes sin so you can enjoy your sin for a season? Are you gifted at dissecting sin in the lives of others while conveniently overlooking yours? Jesus has just rebuked you so you will hopefully wake up and turn to Him in faith. Knowing that, at time, it takes quite a bit of effort to arouse the one who is in sinful spiritual slumber, Paul adds a second answer to a person who is content with the spiritual life which ultimately rejects Him.

God Supplies The Rightness of His Judgment Against The Moralist (Rom. 1:2-4)

To the person who might reply, "God, it is so inappropriate and unfair for you to judge moral, ethical, and religious people with eternal wrath," Paul definitively states,

²But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. (Rom. 2 NKJ)

God is not a judge who is prone to make mistakes. He'll never walk away from a case and think to Himself, "You know, I didn't have all of the facts, and I might have been wrong in my final verdict." From one end of the Scriptures to another, God informs us that in His heavenly courtroom there is always perfect judgment and justice. Zephaniah's prophetic words not only underscore God's just judgment, they sound as if they could be repeated to our carnal culture:

¹ Woe to her who is rebellious and defiled, The tyrannical city! ² She heeded no voice; she accepted no instruction. She did not trust in the LORD; she did not draw near to her God. ³ Her princes within her are roaring lions, her judges are wolves at evening; they leave nothing for the morning. ⁴ Her prophets are reckless, treacherous men; her priests have profaned the sanctuary. They have done violence to the law. ⁵ The LORD is righteous within her; He will do no injustice. Every morning He brings His justice to light; He does not fail. But the unjust knows no shame (Zeph. 3).

How true. God can and never will “do no injustice.” When He makes judgments against the wicked in the here and now and in the hereafter no one can ever say His judgment is unfair. No, His judgment against sin and sinners is always fair. Why? Because of several factors.

- *Since He is omniscient He will get behind the facts of situation and expose the person's real motives.* As Paul warns, “⁵Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God” (1 Cor. 4). You can deceive people around you into thinking you are all that when in reality your heart is dark and full of sin. One day God will present the truth of your life at His judgment bar, and if your life is not covered by the blood of His Son the eternal judgment which will come your way will be just.
- *He judges godless activity.* No innocent people wind up the recipients of His judgment and justice. Jude tells us this much, “¹⁴And about these also Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, “Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, ¹⁵ to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him” (Jude 1).
- *Since He is omniscient He will bring all deeds to the light.* Solomon echoed this truth when he remarked, “¹⁴For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil” (Ecc. 12).
- *He shows absolutely no favoritism.* Peter teaches us this truth, “⁷And if you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon earth” (1 Pet. 1). He won't care who you were/are, how much you were/are worth, who your daddy was/is, where you lived/live, where you went/go to college, where you worked/work, who you knew/know, or the like.

With a divine Judge like this, you can bank on the fact that His judgment against seemingly ethical, moral, and highly religious people will be flawless and correct. He'll have all the external and internal facts of their lives, and there is no price to pay to buy off His judgment, nor is there any hope of Him showing you one iota of favoritism. When He judges you one day it will be perfect in every way. Paul explains this concept further in the ensuing verses:

³ And do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment upon those who practice such things and do the same *yourself*, that you will escape the judgment of God?

Verse 3 is where so many people are at. They have actually deceived themselves into thinking divine judgment will blow over them because they are not that bad, or they were pious, or they did their sins because they couldn't help themselves, or their sins were really not sins because they redefined them based on the concept of love, or, well, you fill in the proverbial blank. Yes, like the people of Noah's day, they will listen to the voice of the old prophet for what seems to be 120 years and in the end they will repeatedly reject that messenger and message of God which calls for sinners to repent. They will, conversely, eventually face the judgment of God Almighty.

Paul further explains why God's future judgment of sinners who think they are saints, but are not, will be valid in verse 4.

⁴Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?

What does this rhetorical question means? Let's break it down. What Paul is saying is this, and please bear in mind this is a Marty paraphrase:

- You mean to tell me you have taken advantage of God wealth of kindness, forbearance, and patience toward you by continuing to live a godless life?
- You have taken the fact His blessing has rested upon your life, or that He has not judged you in the here and now that He will look the other way when you stand before Him?
- You mean to tell me you've taken the grace He has shown toward you as a sign He approves of your constant sinful choices?
- You mean to tell me you take his forbearance, or to use a word you know well, tolerance, of your sinful life and lifestyle choices as He must think what you are saying and doing is all well and good.
- You mean to tell me you take the fact He is slow to avenge wrong and to judge sin and sinners as some kind of sign He's okay with your sin, be what it may? It's not okay, and He's not okay with your sin because He is holy.
- You didn't have a clue that all this kindness God showed to you in your lifetime was lovingly designed to guide you to repent of your sin and turn to His Son, Jesus, as your Savior and Lord? That thought never crossed your mangled mind?

Concerning all of this, Barnhouse is right on target when he booms,

“To despise the riches of God's grace is the blackest of all sin. It far outweighs the sins that are a violation of righteousness. Fallen man has a fallen nature. That is why the Lord seemed to overlook the outbreaks of the flesh, knowing man's frame and remembering that he is but dust (Ps. 103:14). You who boast, perhaps, that you are not guilty of the great fleshly sins, should realize that the despising of God's goodness is a sin that far transcends an at that might be called a crime under human law.” ⁵

Why, then, is God being good to you when you are still embracing and enjoying your season of sin? He's waiting for you to see the error of your way and to turn to Him in saving faith. If ever these words were true, they are true in our day of opulence and vast freedoms. How perpetually do the sinners of our day and age trade upon the trinity of God's great grace in order to live ever-increasing lives of godlessness. Let them be warned. His grace is balanced by His wrath and judgment. Now is the day to repent for tomorrow you may have played out your hand and it will be too late.

⁵Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Romans*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eermands Publishing,), 27.

Chorazin was a beautiful location on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. Nestled up in the golden foothills, the quaint town had everything from a view of the lake to its own synagogue. They even had Jesus, the Christ, walking among them performing jaw-dropping miracles, one after the other. But their love of other religions and belief systems, coupled with their disdain for the Messiah claiming he came from Nazareth, of all backwater places, moved them to reject Him outright. Imagine, they had tangible proofs he was the God-man Messiah as prophesied (Isa. 7:14; Mic. 5:1-2), and they still chose to refuse to believe and follow Him.



Concerning these Jewish unbelievers, who had ample revelation to believe He was who He said He was, Jesus spoke these ominous words against them:



²⁰ Then he began to reproach the towns where most of his mighty deeds had been done, since they had not repented. ²¹ Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty deeds done in your midst had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would long ago have repented in sackcloth and ashes. ²² But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. ²³ And as for you, Capernaum: 'Will you be exalted to heaven? You will go down to the netherworld.' For if the mighty deeds done in your midst had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. ²⁴ But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on the day of judgment than for you (Matt. 11).

They were, as Paul, says without excuse. Had they, the religious moralists of the day, only turned to Him in saving faith, the afterlife, really, their current lives, would have been so different. But since they didn't, His wrath against them was justified.



Paul's words now are applicable to you. Are you playing fast and loose with God's grace and patience by living for yourself as if He does not exist? Are you failing to consider that God, in His love for you, has given you ample time to consider the person and work of His Son as the Savior and to come to Him in saving faith? This moment is, no doubt, the time of salvation for you. Drop your excuses for running from Him and He will make your sins whiter than snows.







⁵ 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, ⁶ who will render to every man according to his deeds: ⁷ to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality,

eternal life; ⁸ but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. ⁹ *There will be* tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, ¹⁰ but glory and honor and peace to every man who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹¹ For there is no partiality with God. (Rom. 2:1-11 NAS)