

# The Gospel as it Really Is: Romans Simply Explained

Romans 2:1-16

God's Perfect Judgement

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## Introduction

Something in a conversation with a friend who had spent time in Jail has stayed with me. I don't know if this is true of all inmates but he said that among his peers there was a moral hierarchy. Prisoners judged one another according to the crimes they had committed: Which meant that they could always find someone who is worse than them! *"Yes, I'm in for dealing drugs, but HE over there, he committed Grievous Bodily Harm. I'm better than him; he's worse than me."*

We are making our way slowly through the book of Romans. In chapter 1 the apostle Paul has just described the sins which are found in every village, city, nation and continent of the world: the list runs from impurity to greed, from arrogance to slander.

Paul knows that when this long list is read out in the churches of Rome - or in a church in 21st Century England religious people, people who genuinely try to live a good life, will be doing the prison-moral-hierarchy thing in their heads: *"aren't those pagans a dreadful lot: fancy, adulterers, murderers, rebels!? I may not be perfect, but I'm not like that!"*

Do we find ourselves self-righteously tutting, silently booing at this long list? Now there's a searching question to begin a sermon with!

Paul has religious Jews especially in mind: people who knew and respected and tried to live up to the Ten Commandments (but anyone, from a religious or morally-upright background might be indignant at such a catalogue of wickedness).

Paul knows that no-one is ready to hear and receive the glorious Gospel, not really, not fully, not joyfully, until they acknowledge that they are sinners in need of forgiveness. So Paul can't start to outline the wonderful Good News of Jesus Christ until **everyone** in his audience has been convicted of their sinfulness.

That's easy for someone with a pagan background; they'd recognise and confess to the list of 22 sins, but convincing religious people of their sin is a whole different ball game!

How on earth is he going to convince good religious people that they need the Good News just as much as those "wicked pagans" out there?

His strategy in chapter 2 before us is threefold:

(1) The first is to be extremely direct, Paul moves from "them" when he talks about the sins of the world out there to "you" when he talks to them! Listen to him: "**You**, therefore, have no excuse, **you** who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point **you** judge another, **you** are condemning **yourself**, because **you** who pass judgment do the same things. Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when **you**, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do **you** think **you** will escape God's judgment?" (OUCH!)

(2) Tactic two—he points out their judgemental hypocrisy—they're always finding other people wanting, but if they stopped for one moment to examine their own lives, they'd soon discover that, actually, they are guilty of the same sorts of things they accuse others of doing!

(3) But his third and most important tactic is to remind them that **God is the righteous Judge** of the earth, not them. And one day when they come under God's judgement he will find them wanting.

In Romans 2:1-16, Paul is trying to convince religious people that they are sinners in need of the Gospel. Let's try to summarise what Paul says about the Judgement of God and then apply these verses to our own hearts and minds. Paul teaches four truths about the Judgement of God.

### **(1) Everyone will stand before the Judgement seat of God**

*“the day of God's wrath when his righteous judgement will be revealed.” (verse 5) “This will take place on the day when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.” (verse 16)*

According to the Scriptures, this present world's history will end when Jesus returns in power and glory and splendour to judge the world on behalf of God the Father. You will be there, and so will I.

How will God judge the world? What standard will he use?

### **(2) Everyone will be judged by the law**

The Ten Commandments will be the standard by which all humanity will be judged. People who had access to the 10Cs, who know God's law will be judged by their obedience or disobedience to them. People who never heard of the ten commandment will be judged by the law they find in their consciences. Listen to Paul

*“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.” (verse 12) “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. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bear witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.” (verses 14-15)*

The Christian writer CS Lewis, at the end of his little book “the abolition of man” compiled a list of dos and don'ts from ancient cultures of the world and he showed that people everywhere know they should (1) look after their parents; (2) not steal; (3) not take another man's wife, (4) not hurt others, and so on. That's 4 of the ten commandments, written on the hearts and consciences of people who did not have the Bible!

Everyone will be judged by God's moral standard, which is the 10 commandments, but people who have never read the Bible will be judged according to the laws they find in their conscience. Did they obey those laws or did they disobey them? That will be the question – they will be judged according to their deeds.

*God “will repay each person according to **what they have done**.” To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honour 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. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honour and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”*

Paul is not teaching that it is possible for someone to attain eternal life by good deeds, he's not saying that some people will be saved by their works! He's saying that **theoretically** if someone *did* live a good and perfect life they would gain eternal life. The point he's making is that it that judgement is according to **deeds**. No-one has ever lived that life, except the Lord Jesus Christ, that's why we all need the Gospel!

So the whole world will be judged according to their deeds, and note what Paul says in verse 16, that includes our secrets. The things we have done which no-one else knows about. The things we have hidden from others, skeletons in the cupboard. God will judge us by EVERY deed we have done. It's a an awesome truth isn't it? Who on earth would be audacious enough to say “I can get to heaven by my good works?”

### (3) Everyone will be Judged fairly

*“God’s judgement ... is based on **truth**” (verse 2)*

*God’s “**righteous judgement** will be revealed.” (verse 5)*

*“God does not show **favouritism.**” (verse 11)*

Aren't you glad that God is the judge? In this world there are many miscarriage of justice, small and large. Being blamed for what you did not is painful because made in the image of God, we all have a keen sense of justice and long for vindication!

God the righteous Judge can't be bribed, he has no favourites, he carries no biases, he knows all the facts of the case, and will judge you and I with utter fairness.

Frank Caprio, a YouTube celebrity, is called “Americas kindest judge.” His son followed in his footsteps, and when he tried his first case, asked dad to come into court. A lady had done something wrong so son Caprio “threw the book at her.” Afterwards he asked his dad “How did I do?” expecting a pat on the back. But dad Caprio chastised his son, “You did not listen to her story, you did not take into account all the mitigating facts of her wrong deed.”

Verse 6, I am so glad that Jesus will be my Judge; *“This will take place on the day when God judges people’s secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.”* (verse 16)

The divine Son of God who walked in this world, bore our sorrows, experienced our temptations, ever and always without sin, who understands our life.

Everyone will be judged fairly.

In the fourth place, and we have to wait till chapter 3 for the universal verdict;

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#### 4. Everyone will be found guilty on that day

*“all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (3:23)*

No-one, but no-one, will be found to have lived a righteous life in thought, word or deed. Both in commission and omission ALL will be found guilty.

#### Application—two final words

Let’s apply the words of Romans chapter 2 to ourselves, March 30th 2025; two final words.

##### ***(1) True Christians—live a life of daily repentance***

Don’t think that because you grew up in a Christian home, belong to a Bible-believing church, and love sound doctrine, that you can live as you please. That’s always the temptation of spiritual privilege. How is your repentance and mine? Are we hating and daily turning away from our sin?

Martin Luther’s biggest problem with the religion of 1500s Europe wasn’t a corrupt pope or the worship of Mary, it was its lack of repentance. Repentance had become “penance” a ritualised but meaningless custom. And so he wrote as his first of 95 theses: *When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent,' he willed **the entire life of believers to be one of repentance***

One of the most vibrant marks of **true religion** is contrite heart. So if you are concerned this morning about your sin, often cut up over your failings, confess, repent and be of good cheer, for *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broke and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Psalm 51:17)*

But the Spirit is also speaking to...

## **(2) Religious people—religion won't save you**

*“You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. (see the hypocrisy?) Now we know that God’s judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God’s judgment? Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance. (If you are a special group of people, Paul’s thinking especially of the Jews, then the purpose of God’s kindness to you was to draw you to repentance, but they’ve despised that kindness by their sinful lives). But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath.” (1-5)*

England is filled with religious people! 46% of people in England identify themselves as Christian! But if 46% of the nation were true believers, England would be a different place.

Everyone needs to hear the Gospel of a Saviour because everyone is a sinner, including religious people.

Two men went to the temple to pray, said Jesus:

*“The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers— or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said,*

*‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”*

May God give to us all a true conviction of our sin so that we might turn in repentance to God and find in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ the free gift of salvation by believing in Him.

Amen.