

Is My Defense My Righteousness?

Romans 2

“no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical.”
(Ro 2:28)

“The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord...”
(Ro 14:6)

“This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. ²³ But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, ²⁴ I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while.” (Ro 15:22–24).

“Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.” (Ro 15:7)

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, . . . ²² On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ ²³ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”
(Mt 7:21–23)

I. Who Is a Self-Righteous Person?

“Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. ² We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things.” (Ro 2:1–2)

A. A Self-Righteous Person Judges Others While Doing the Same

“So they are without excuse. ²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”
(Ro 1:20–21)

“You then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? ²² You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³ You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. ²⁴ For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.” (Ro 2:21–24)

“Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness.” (Lk 11:39)

B. A Self-Righteous Person Thinks That God Will Overlook His Sins

“Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? ⁴ Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?” (Ro 2:3–4)

- **The Lineage**

“You call yourself a Jew” (Ro 2:17)

“I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. ³⁸ I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father.’ ³⁹ They answered him, ‘Abraham is our father.’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing the works Abraham did.’” (Jn 8:37–39)

- **Possession of God’s Word**

“you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God ¹⁸ and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law; ¹⁹ and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, ²⁰ an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth— ²¹ you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself?” (Ro 2:17–21)

“You then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? ²² You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? (Ro 2:21–22)

- **A Sign of the Covenant**

“²⁵ For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. ²⁶ So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? ²⁷ Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law.” (Ro 2:25–27)

“If you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision.” (Ro 2:25)

C. A Self-Righteous Person Boasts of His Outward Behavior

“For no one is a Jew who **is merely one outwardly**, nor is circumcision **outward** and physical.”
(Ro 2:28)

“Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people **in order to be seen by them**, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. ² Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that **they may be praised by others**. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. . . ⁵ And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, **that they may be seen by others**. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.” (Mt 6:1–5)

“You call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and **boast in God** ¹⁸ and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law; ¹⁹ and if **you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness...**” (Ro 2:17–19)

II. Why Is a Self-Righteous Person's Position So Severe?

“But because of your hard and impenitent heart **you are storing up wrath** for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. ⁶ He will render to each one according to his works: ⁷ to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; ⁸ but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, **there will be wrath and fury**. ⁹ **There will be tribulation and distress** for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, ¹⁰ but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. ¹¹ **For God shows no partiality.**” (Ro 2:5–11)

“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. ¹³ For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. ¹⁴ For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵ They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them ¹⁶ on that day when, according to my gospel, **God judges the secrets of men** by Christ Jesus.”
(Ro 2:12–16)

“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²² But I tell you, **it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you**. ²³ And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. ²⁴ But I tell you that **it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.**” (Mt 11:21–24)

III. What Should a Self-Righteous Person Do?

"He will render to each one according to his works: ⁷ to those who by **patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life;** ⁸ but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. ⁹ There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, ¹⁰ but **glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good,** the Jew first and also the Greek." (Ro. 2:6-10)

"For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but **the doers of the law who will be justified.**" (Ro 2:13)

"For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin." (Ro 3:20)

"But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— ²² **the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.** For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are **justified by his grace as a gift,** through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus..." (Ro 3:21-24)

"Faith unites the soul with Christ, as a bride is united with her bridegroom. From such a marriage, as Paul says, it follows that Christ and the soul become one body, so that they hold all things in common, whether for better or worse. Christ is full of grace, life, and salvation; the soul is full of sins, death, and damnation. Now let faith step in, and then sins, death, and damnation will belong to Christ, while grace, life, and salvation will belong to the soul. O blessed exchange! Christ, the rich, noble, and holy Bridegroom, takes in marriage this poor, contemptible, wicked little prostitute, saves her, delivers her from all evil, and adorns her with all His goodness."
(Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*)