

## Romans 2

Last week we wrapped up chapter 1. (That was no easy passage – but some of the best conversations about truth and compassion I’ve ever had about the Bible have happened this week in response to last week’s sermon – the texts, emails, group discussions. And by the way, couple of things – the notes from the previous week are posted online Monday if you want to go more in depth or missed something you wanted to write down – and also shout out to Zach and Cherish Woodis for a great online devotional this week – we’ll be having members give insights each week on the chapter as we work through).

Today we move into chapter 2. (We took two weeks to talk about chapter 1 because it’s so dense. It’s not hard to understand, but hard to apply).

But what we talked about is this:

In the 1<sup>st</sup> half – he talks about the goodness of God – we love that  
2<sup>nd</sup> half – the judgment of God

But God can’t be a good father if he doesn’t hold evil into account. It like, “I’m the father of three children, if I see someone hurting them and I don’t step in to deal with the evil, I’m not a very good father.

Same thing with God. Yes, he loves us. But he’s also righteous, and he holds evil into account, and both are very important.

That’s what we talked about last week.

This week – as we get into chapter 2, this is what we’ll learn (and is a response to a dangerous mindset that can develop in response to those who get caught up in sin:

Religion is not able to do what only Jesus can do!

Some of us read chapter 1 and say, “Can you believe all those sinners? They deserve wrath.”

What Paul is going to do in chapter 2 is turn it to the religious and say – “Let’s talk about you for a minute.”

And so here’s the thing – humanity is made up of basically two kinds of people.

There are the rule breakers (who believe rules exist to break – that’s Romans 1 people by the way).

And then there’s the rule followers (and most of them are pretty good at following the rules. But the vulnerability is, sometimes rule followers believe it’s their job to let everybody else know they’re not following the rules as well as they are, right?)

It happens at school – teachers get up first day and says, “Here are some of our classroom rules,” and there are kids in the back saying, “Yeah right!” And they’re always just pushing the boundaries, and they drive the teacher crazy.

And then there are kids sitting up front, and they are turned in, listening, writing down all the rules, and they look back at these all these troublemakers with contempt.

And it’s not just school – because in every church, there are rule breakers and rule followers. Rule breakers – chapter 1 (he dealt with that there).

But in chapter 2, Paul is going to turn to the rule followers (who commonly have an air of judgmentalism about them) and say, “Listen, you are just as sinful as those who are rule breakers. Your sin might look different, but in the eyes of God is the exact same. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and religion will not save you, it will not fix you, it will not transform you, if cannot make you truly obedient to God’s law.”

(Like – just knowing the speed limit doesn’t make you a better driver).

Some folks think, “If I’m right, if I know the right things to do, I’m going to be on God’s good side.” And Paul says, “No, just being right is not enough to make you actually want to follow and obey God.”

You don’t need to just be right, you need a new work of God to change you from the inside out. And that’s the Gospel.

And what Paul will say is – “Christian, as long as you see ourselves wearing the white hat and everyone else wearing the black hat, you won’t be very effective with the Gospel, and in fact, you’ll put your own soul in danger.

Because the Gospel doesn't say there's good guys and bad guys, it says there's only one category of humanity, and that sinners. And that's you – and it's me.

And so we are all guilty – we all need grace – and what God is offering for the humble and penitent in heart, is a changed life and a changed destiny.

Pray – your truth is something that primarily transforms us, not someone else

Romans 2:1-5

**So, verse 1** – when you do that, you condemn yourself. Why? You are holding them to a standard you can't live up to yourself.

So often, we do in our heart the same thing people who are rebellious do in action.

The only difference – we didn't get caught doing something. There's no stigma attached to it because we did it in private, they just did it in public.

It may be hidden, but it's still in the heart.

Matthew 5-7 – “you have heart don't commit murder.” The disciples hear that and say, “Yep, that's right, but not me. I've never done that. I'm not a murdered.”

And Jesus says, “But you can murder someone in your heart.”

He said, “You've heard it said don't commit adultery.” “Yep, not me.”

Jesus says, “Have you ever lusted after someone in your heart?” If so – you've committed adultery.

You see what Jesus is saying? So often morality, religion - is a veneer covering a heart that is just as sinful as everyone else.

And so just knowing the law of God (just knowing the right thing) doesn't make you a disciples who is able to keep the law. Just being religious doesn't save you.

But this is the world we live in – and it comes out in a number of ways – like folks who go on this crusade and “speak their voice” and think it's a spiritual gift to call out the sins of everybody else.

But I think it needs to be said - Being outraged (at something bad) doesn't make you good.

We see that on these big Facebook dramas that get cranked up. I'm so right, I'm gonna speak my truth, and before it's over, we're caught up in this nexus of comments that are every bit as sinful in their judgments as what we're condemning.

Listen – stop taking it upon yourself to label all of the bad people! IT'S MORE COMPLICATED THAN THAT!

I love what **Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn said:**

**“The battleline between good and evil runs through the heart of every man.” - Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn**

**(And let's be honest – sometimes, the darkest place on the face of the earth, is inside the secret thoughts of our own hearts).**

So knowing the law of God can give you a standard, but it can't change your heart. And it's the heart that God will notice of the Day of Judgment.

So verse 4 – the New Century Version – so all of us need to understand:

<sup>4</sup>He has been very kind and patient, waiting for you to change, but you think nothing of his kindness. Perhaps you do not understand that God is kind to you so you will change your hearts and lives (NCV).

There's a philosophy that says, “Because you are rich and prosperous, it must be because you were blessed by God because you're a good person – because I'm a pretty good guy, I'm a pretty good gal.

No – God has been good to you, not so you can take pride in all your positions, not because you're such a model of virtue, but because he loves you.

Verse 5 – But you are stubborn and refuse to change, so you are making your own punishment even greater on the day he shows his anger. On that day everyone will see God's right judgments. (NCV)

Listen – God may be blessing you, it's not because you're so good. No – **God's kindness is there to lead us to repentance, not arrogance.**

His wrath is being postponed, but not to give us false pride. And because of his kindness (AND HIS JUDGEMENT), all of us – especially those who benefitted from a positive faith experience – should live with a grateful, a humble, and a repentant heart.

6-12

So we see God will judge the moral and religious, just like he will judge the rebellious and immoral.

Because apart from Jesus, all of our works fall short of God's perfect standards.

Now - **verse 6** can be a little confusing. Is he saying we can work our way to heaven?

No, that's not what he's saying. We know that because of other passages, like , but works flow out of a heart at peace with God.

Ephesians 2:8-10

<sup>8</sup>For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup>not by works, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup>For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

What is Paul saying?

Works are the evidence of our faith, not the basis of it.

Paul is saying that works matter-not as the basis for salvation, but as the evidence that someone has the faith that saves.

And you might notice a footnote in your Bible after verse 6, where Paul is quoting from Psalm 62 where his point is that what matters to fundamentally is a person's relationship with God, and as a result, good works flow from that - the EVIDENCE of our faith.

And so – good works show we have saving faith; they do not add to our faith in saving us.

Or think of it this way: the apples on an apple tree prove life, but they don't provide it.

The apples are the evidence that the apple tree is alive, but the leaves don't create life. That comes from another source – from the creative power of God.

In Psalm 62, the writer is lamenting people who have an external practice of religion, but internally they are filled with wickedness. They are religious on the outside, but corrupt on the outside.

And so his point is - you could have lots of works and still be condemned, because you were doing it for notoriety instead of faith.

And on the final day of judgement, God will look beyond the outward performance of religion and works to the motives of the heart.

And so, **verse 11** says, “For God does not show favoritism.”

1 Samuel 16:7 says, “The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

We see the outside, God sees the inside. God will judge us based on the motives of the heart - and that's true for every man and woman, religious or not.

Verses 13-16

And so his point is – verse 13 – simply knowing the rules is not what save you. (You're in recovery – you go to meetings and IOP sessions, and you say, “I've heard this a thousand times.” YOU KNOW IT!

But – do you do it! Do you apply it? Do you have a heart that's obedient, willing to learn, cooperative and humble?

In Paul's time, the Jews thought they were chosen, that they were more privileged than anyone else. Why? Because they had more knowledge about God than everyone else.

The problem was – though they had all this access to knowledge, they didn't do anything with it. (They knew the truth, they just didn't live by the truth).

But let's zoom in on our world – in American – we have access to the Word (YouVersion – get that on your phone if you don't have it), multiple translations, formats, freedom to worship and go to church, hear great teachers, but are we doing anything with that?

The latest statistic I read - 23% of Americans go to church once a month. And that's all.

We have access to all this knowledge, but we don't live by it. (I won't ask for a show of hands, but who read Romans this week? Did you build any time built in your schedule to seek the will of God?)

Some of us, our lives are a mess, and the one thing God makes available to change our lives is the one thing we don't even read. (And it's not like there's not 100's of Bible studies, bible apps).

In parts of the world people are begging to get their hands on a copy of the Scriptures. Here we, can get copies, versions, (shoot, there's even a comic book version if you want it), we can hear it on audio, play it in the car, listen to Morgan Freeman read the book of Leviticus driving down the road.

People are hungering for the Word of God, but we're so distracted we don't have time to read it??

We don't need to preach to others about idol worship, because sometimes we won't show up to church because it's summer?

We eat out 5 times each week, but cut back on our tithe – or don't give at all on Sunday – because we've spent it all on our stomachs.

I talked to group of preachers the other day – and couple of churches struggling – and one of them was talking about how covid changed things – and he said, “we can't talk about all the evil people out there when we won't come to church because it's raining.”

We won't miss any single other thing but the least thing will cause is to miss bible study. It just doesn't take much. (And kids are watching that – what's important to us is shown by what our priorities are).

We cannot brag about being a follower of Christ when we're not following Christ

And that's what a lot of people do (not you – this church is such an exception. You are phenomenal, but we need to make sure we never start going down this self-righteous, judgmental road.

So it's ok to wear the shirt, post the Bible verse, get the tattoo – but we better live this out.

And when we blow it, say, “God forgive me. I'm sorry.” Because the world is watching me, and it's not just so you can get to heaven, but so your kids can get to heave, your neighbors can get to heaven.

Listen – your kids are watching you.

You come to church, get in the car and fight – listen to God-knows-what, watch what God-knows-what – your kids see this – and they say this while church thing is bull.

We've got to be consistent. It doesn't mean we're perfect, but we're steady, and we're repentant.

We can fool everybody, but we can never fool God.

While I was preparing for this lesson, I was studying in kitchen – looked over at door under sink.

Years ago, got mad once early years, anger, kicked the cabinet door – split in two – room silent – kids ran off to room

They are more affected by how I control my impatience than how many sermons I post on FB.

I was the preacher, and they needed to know – is dad just preaching it, or is he living it?

#### **Verse 14 -**

But - what about people who don't know the law of God? What about the guy in the jungles of Africa who's never seen a Bible – how can God judge someone like that?

Paul says, “You claim to be righteous before God because you have been given the law – because you know the law – you've memorized the law – but you Jews aren't the only ones with a law – so let me prove it.

In verse 14 Paul begins to talk about this reality, that every person is born with a sense of moral oughtness, an understanding of basic right and wrong.

Why? Because the law of God has been written on every human heart. It's our conscience.

There's a portion of God's image and likeness in every human heart. (We talked about that last week – Romans 1:20 – the knowledge of God is stamped on the conscience of every man).

And so his point is, if you have the law, keep it, because we are judged by the things we know.

And those who don't know the law will be judged by the commands God has written on their hearts, because that is the only law they know.

And the point is – God doesn't play favorites. All have sinned.

Verse 16 – God will judge our secret sins because on the day of judgment he will look past the veneer of sin in all people. Because here's the thing – without Jesus, no matter how good you are, you are depraved and you need grace.

17-24

(We can just insert “Christian” for “Jew” in verse 17).

(24 – non Christians turn from God. Why? Because of you and your hypocrisy)

So Paul says, when you look down deep at the motives of your own heart, you claim to be a teacher of children, a guide to the blind, you know all the rules. Awesome! But when you look at your own heart honestly, don't you do things you tell others not to do? (“Do as I say, not as I do?”)

“You teach others, do you teach yourself?”

“You notice how everyone else breaks the law, but do you break it also?”

**I love what Corey Trimble says: Christians started wearing masks long before this thing called Covid.**

You see, here's what makes religiosity so dangerous – religiosity brings about a “theoretical concept only” stance toward God's word.

Because so often as Christians, WE ARE MASTERS OF TALKING ABOUT people's struggles CONCEPTUALLY and THEORETICALLY – but NOT COMPASSIONATELY.

Because as humans, we're terrible at putting ourselves selves in another person's shoes.

Elder who served with group of 7 – “When it came to the issue of divorce and remarriage, I was the one who took the hard line position, I was the one who could argue all the points, I was the one who had the answers as to what a divorced person ought to do. UNTIL . . . my daughter went through a divorce.” (And then – it was my little girl, and it was not longer an issue, it was a person whom I loved deeply).

So do you see Paul's point: If you see concepts of truth as ammunition so you can load up your Gospel gun to hit all the bad people who need it more than you, you don't understand the Gospel in the least bit.

Here's what Jesus said in John 3:17 - For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

When we remove the human element, with all of its complexities, we become judges instead of bearers of hope and the Good News!

You see his point?

Verse 21 – **You say, “Don't steal.** But be honest – have you ever fudged that invoice a little and charged a little more than you should? If you get paid hourly, have you ever killed a little time. Are you getting paid to surf Instagram while you're on the clock? (And we've all done this)

You get paid mileage. Instead of going the straight route between point a and b, have you ever taken the long way?

And if you're honest with yourself, you recognize you and I have the same propensity toward sin as someone who's facing really serious consequences.

**You who commit adultery – be honest.** Have you ever sexually fantasized about someone you're not married to?

**You abhor idols** – let me explain. In the Jewish world there was nothing more detestable than someone who would go to a pagan temple and worship a false god.

Paul says you abhor idols, but you're guilty of robbing temples. What does he mean by that? (He's speaking figuratively). When you get down to it, you worship things that aren't God in your life.

We asked this question in our classes Wednesday – Who are the god and goddesses of our day, and where are their temples? Suggestions – cell

phone, social media, a campsite, an arena or stadium, 2 hours scrolling stupid cat tricks

So what's the difference? The same bent toward sin dwells in the heart of Christians like everyone else.

It was in her book, "To Kill a Mockingbird, that Harper Lee made this observation, that a Bible in the hand of one man is just as dangerous as a bottle of whiskey in the hand of someone else.

The same problem resides in every human hear, and people don't want to deal with Christians because of that.

Okay – last part. (We'll read this part out of the Good News Translation for understanding's sake).

Remember – he's talking to Jews who have been circumcised as a sign of their covenant relationship with God. If you were circumcised as a young male baby when you were 8 days old, you belonged to the people of Israel.

<sup>25</sup> If you obey the Law, your circumcision is of value; but if you disobey the Law, you might as well never have been circumcised. <sup>26</sup> If the Gentile, who is not circumcised, obeys the commands of the Law, will not God regard him as though he were circumcised? <sup>27</sup> And so you Jews will be condemned by the Gentiles because you break the Law, even though you have it written down and are circumcised; but they obey the Law, even though they are not physically circumcised. <sup>28</sup> After all, who is a real Jew, truly circumcised? It is not the man who is a Jew on the outside, whose circumcision is a physical thing. <sup>29</sup> Rather, the real Jew is the person who is a Jew on the inside, that is, whose heart has been circumcised, and this is the work of God's Spirit, not of the written Law. Such a person receives praise from God, not from human beings (Good News Translation)

Some of the people are listening to Paul being read and thinking, "You may be right about what you're saying, but I got circumcised as a baby. I'm not concerned, because I went through this ceremony."

(Do you realize how many times I've heard Christians talk about their baptism that way – or the fact that they prayed a prayer during an altar call at a revival? I'm good! Or if they don't say it, they think it.)

And so many think it doesn't matter that we're not transformed, that there's no presence of the Sprit in our lives – we think because we went through this certain ceremony we're good.

But what Paul wants the church to see is something like baptism, if not understood properly, can be nothing more than a label on a can.

A guy told me recently about his daughter collecting canned goods labels for a school project. She went in and ripped off all the labels from the cans in his pantry. He said, "You think you're gonna get beans, and you get cream of celery."

"What's for supper tonight, honey?" "Soup!" ("No, kraut!")

So here's the point – sometimes the label on the outside doesn't match the reality on the outside.

So many say people say, "I'm a Christian, I got the bumper sticker, I've got the tattoo to prove it, I post the Christian meme to show it – but in our lives there are no fruits, no indication God has changed our language, our time – that he has transformed us from the inside out.

So what Paul is getting us to see – verse 28 – is this: salvation does not occur through ceremonies that are only outward and physical, salvation happens inwardly and that is a matter of the heart.

True conversion is a matter of the Spirit – when you move from life to death, darkness to light, the old is gone, the new has come – it's not punching a golden ticket to heave because "I'm good."

Paul is saying – when someone becomes part of the family of God, the important thing is not the praise of men but the daily praise of God.

It is serving him day by day, being transformed into his image – and that's shown by what we do.

You know what the first fruit of the Spirit is in Galatians 5? Love

It's harder to love than to judge. It's riskier, more involved, messier. Easier to say, "Well, that person – they just don't know the truth, live by the truth." We feel smug and safe in the fact that we have the truth and others don't. And here we go labeling people, and much of that is to justify ourselves.

Love is work – and not everyone wants to put in the work.

To forgive – that’s work! To get to know someone and get closer to them and really know their story instead of judging them – that takes work! But so many Christians want to judge instead because it’s easy and it’s self-affirming – oh, that church is this, that person is this.

We’ve got to stop that!

Jesus said, “By this all men will know you are my disciple, if you love one another.”

Someone says, “I’m right! Okay. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13, even if I’m right, but I don’t have love, I’m like a stricken gong or a clanging cymbal.

You’re right – but guess what – nobody cares. Why? Because you’re being a jerk! You’re unkind.

So what can transform you and make you into a loving person? Rules? No – religion can’t transform you, religion can’t fix you, religion can’t save you.

Religion can make you really good at seeing the problem with everyone else, but the one thing it can’t do is turn the mirror and show you that perhaps the biggest sinner of all is you!

We look at the speck in another’s eye, and fail to see the log in our own.

But this is good news. Why?

Because the invitation of the Gospel, is not a new set of rules, but a new heart.

Let’s just come before God humbly this morning -