

September 13, 2026

COMING JUDGMENT: ROMANS 2:1-13

Introductory Activity

Explain: Today we are going to start with a puzzle. We are going to play reverse Family Feud. Normally, I would give you the category, and you would guess what belongs in that category. Today I am going to give the items in the category, and you have to tell me the category. For example, if I said apple, pear, and cherry, the category would be Types of Fruit. I am going to give you a list of quotes, and have you name the situation in which they might be said. When you have the answer, just raise your hand. When we are done, I will let the person who raised their hand first answer. Here are the quotes:

"I am late for work." "The gas pedal is stuck." "I didn't realize." "I have to potty." It's an emergency." "I need to get to the hospital."¹

The answer is: Things people say when they are pulled over for speeding.

Summarize and Transition: It is probably common for people to give excuses when they are pulled over for speeding. However, the truth is, usually we have no real excuse that would justify our speeding. Today we are going to look at Romans chapter 2. Chapters 1-3:20 present the bad news of the gospel. Last week, when we explored a portion of chapter 1, we learned that Gentiles have no excuse for rejecting the Lord. Today, we will continue in that theme and see that Jews have no excuse for rejecting the Lord.

1. NO EXCUSES (ROM. 2:1-5)

Read (or have someone read) Romans 2:1-5.

Explain: Paul begins by making a subtle turn away from Gentiles toward the Jews. He doesn't actually mention the Jews as his direct audience until verse 17. This subtle turn from the Gentiles comes after an extended condemnation of the extent of human (read: Gentile) sinfulness that closes chapter 1. In chapter 2, he turns to the self-righteous judge who might have been nodding along while listening to Paul's words in chapter 1. The judgmental attitude of the self-righteous Jews towards the "Gentile sinfulness" of chapter 1 should not be a surprise. "Jewish national and religious pride encouraged them to despise the 'Gentile dogs' and have nothing to do with them." (Be, 26) Paul here does not condemn them directly for their judgmental attitude (although that would be justified); instead, he says they condemn themselves because they judge hypocritically. He says the judges judge while they "do the same thing." Now it is very unlikely that the Jews were participating in the outwardly

Notes:

This Lesson was created using:

- *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (ETB LG)
- *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* (ETB PSG)
- *Explore the Bible Commentary* (ETBC)
- *New American Commentary: Romans*, Mounce (NAC)
- *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans*, Moo (NICNT)
- *Exalting Jesus in Romans*, Merida (Exalting)
- *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Romans*, Bruce (TNTC)
- *Be Right*, Wiersbe (Be)

"suddenly picking out the complacent individual who has been enjoying the exposure of those sins he 'has no mind to' and telling him that he is not better than anyone else." (TNTC, 82)

"The religious who were prepared so readily to condemn the ungodly needed to take an honest look at themselves too." (ETBC, 21)

¹ Jacobs, A.J. (Host) (2026, August 24) "Words from the President...Literally!" In *Hello, Puzzlers!*. Neuhaus Ideas. J Cardinell, 2026

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visible sexual sins listed in chapter 1 (although the Sermon on the Mount would expose this sinful reality). It would not be hard to imagine that the judgmental Jews were participating in the sins listed in verses 29-30 of chapter 1.

Read Romans 1:29-30 (See Notes Box.)

Paul says that as judges who practice what they condemn, they have “no excuse” before God. He used this same language in chapter 1 to condemn the Gentiles. In 1:20, Paul said that the Gentile is “without excuse” because of God’s general revelation of Himself in creation. In chapter 2, he says that the Jews are without excuse because of the special revelation they have received. “Those who condemn others for sinning against God clearly know God's teaching. Therefore, when they commit the same sins as those whom they would label as ungodly and unrighteous, they cannot claim ignorance of God's revelation.” (ETBC, 22)

Now we need to stop and clarify what Paul is doing before we apply this to our context. Paul is laying out an argument to demonstrate the need for a Savior. The self-righteous Jew did not feel he needed a savior. This passage is not so much a passage about judgmentalism (even though we should not be judgmental). Instead, this passage is meant to reveal that even those who appear to be “good” still need a Savior.

Discuss: The Jews viewed their nationality and their outward observance of the OT law as negating any possibility of divine judgment. What are some excuses people give today for their sin, and what reasons might they give for not acknowledging their need for a Savior?

Explain: “Good” people give many reasons to themselves and others in an effort to deny any culpability related to sin: “I go to church;” “I give to worthy causes;” “I was baptized;” or “My grandma taught Sunday School.” They might also deny the reality of their sin: “It’s not so bad;” “Everyone or society says it’s ok;” or, like the Jews in verse 1, “I am not as bad as so-and-so.” Paul is clear that we all need a Savior because God’s judgment is a reality.

In verses 2-4, he reveals three truths about God’s judgment. First, God’s **Judgment is Just**. Paul says God’s judgment “is based on the truth.” We can read this in various ways. His judgment is based on the truth of universal human wickedness. His judgment is based on the divine truth of wickedness as defined in Scripture. As Wiersbe puts it, “God's judgment is according to truth. He does not have one standard for the Jews and another for the Gentiles.” (Be, 26) Lastly, God’s judgment is “utterly impartial.” (Phillips translation)

Verse 3 reveals that **God’s Judgment is Certain**. Still speaking to the self-righteous judge, Paul asks the first of two questions. “Do you really think ...that you will escape God’s judgment?” This is a particularly pointed question for first-century Jews. The intertestamental book (written

Notes:

Romans 1:29-30

²⁹ They are filled with all unrighteousness, evil, greed, and wickedness. They are full of envy, murder, quarrels, deceit, and malice. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, God-haters, arrogant, proud, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,

between the time of the OT and the NT and not accepted as Scripture by Protestants) *The Wisdom of Solomon*, says, "But thou, our God, art kind and true, patient, and ruling all things in mercy. For even if we sin we are thine knowing thy power." (15:1-2) Moo writes, "the assumption of God's special favor toward his people had already in the OT period become a source of false security for those within Israel who were not living faithfully within the covenant, as the preaching of the prophets abundantly illustrates." (NICNT, 133) The Jews thought they were exempt from God's judgment because of the covenant between God and Israel. Today, people simply negate the reality of judgment by denying the reality of an afterlife. If the unbeliever *does* acknowledge the reality of an afterlife, they often assume it is paradise for everyone. As we discussed last week when we examined the reality and necessity of God's wrath, God's judgment is necessitated by His holiness. God's judgment is certain.

In a second question presented in verse 4, Paul asks, "Do you despise the riches of his kindness, restraint, and patience?" Here we see that **God's Judgement is Presently Delayed**. Last week we saw that God's wrath is manifest in the personal and societal consequences of sin. Here Paul is talking about the final judgment of mankind. Paul says that God's just and certain judgment is delayed out of "kindness, restraint, and patience." In Second Peter, the apostle Peter comes at this truth from a different angle. There he speaks of the promised end-times blessing of believers that parallels God's judgment of the wicked. In 2 Peter 3:9 he writes, "The Lord does not delay his promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance." The "kindness, restraint, and patience" that leads God to the delay of both the end-times blessing (Peter) and end-time judgment (Paul) is meant to give humanity more time to repent.

Discuss: Remember Paul is writing to believers in Rome in an effort to introduce himself and his theology to the Romans prior to his visit. Romans 1-3:20 presents the bad news of the gospel prior to the revelation of the good news. The early readers of the text already believed what Paul is saying. So, this passage isn't meant to convince them or win them to faith. Many of us in our small groups are in the same place as the early readers. So, let's ask ourselves a question. How should the believer respond to this reminder that God's judgment is just, certain, and presently delayed?

The reality of God's judgment should remind us of our calling and duty to share the Gospel with everyone. In chapter 1, Paul says he is obligated to preach the gospel (1:14). We might wholeheartedly agree and seek to emulate Paul when encountering people like the overt sinners described in chapter 1. However, we might not feel such a great urgency when encountering the "good" people addressed in chapter 2. Nevertheless, to paraphrase one evangelist, "there are a lot of good ole boys out there, and good ole boys need Jesus too."

Verse 5 describes why we need to share the gospel with the good ole boy, the nice soccer mom, the diligent dad, or the nice older lady who refuses to acknowledge their own sin and judges (looks down on) those who practice overt sin. Speaking to the self-righteous, judgmental, 1st century Jews, as well as the “respectable” sinner today, Paul reveals that their hearts are “hardened” to the call of righteousness and repentance. Michael Martin says this is “stubbornness seen in persistent sin in spite of the warnings in God's Word.” (ETBC, 24) Their refusal to acknowledge Christ and repent of sin simply gives them more time to accumulate “a store of wrath.” Like the child who just heaps on punishment because he won’t shut his mouth when his parents warn him of bad behavior, these hardened, unrepentant people are just making things worse for themselves.

Summarize Transition: This passage is part of Paul’s argument for the universal need of the gospel. It speaks to the actions of the self-righteous sinner. We can be reminded that as followers of Jesus, we are forgiven of sin but still struggle with sin. As a result, we should be careful not to practice the judgmental, hypocritical ways of the Jews described in this passage. As the ETB material reminds us, “We should focus on our own sin rather than judging others.” (ETB LG, 29) We can also be reminded of the challenges that come with evangelism. Paul says those who persist in their lostness become hardhearted. That means our evangelism of some will require patience, diligence, and more importantly, longsuffering love.

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One aspect of this passage is God’s kindness, restraint, and patience. We can mirror God’s character in the Reach and Ministry aspect of our groups. As we reach new people, they may struggle (or not even bother to struggle) with sins we have mastered. As a way of welcoming them into the fellowship of our groups, we can be kind, refrain from judgment, and practice patience as they move through their discipleship journey.

Moreover, as we minister to people in and outside our groups, we should maintain a heightened awareness of these attributes. Sometimes we can be prideful and judgmental when helping people or ministering to them during difficult times. We should be sensitive and bear with people as we attempt to minister to them.

2. PERFECT STANDARD (ROM. 2:6-11)

Read (or have someone read) Romans 2:6-11

Paul begins this passage with an expression of the individual nature of the Gospel. The **Eternal Truth** presented in verse 6 reveals that a person is held individually responsible for his or her works. The Jews could not rely on their ethnicity as a member of God’s select people at the time of judgment. Similarly, today a person cannot rely on the works of a righteous family member, their inclusion on the church roll, their nationality, or their race when the judgment comes. To demonstrate this, Paul presents two types of people. He does so with “two balanced couplets (2:7-8 and 2:9-10) depicting two contrasting attitudes toward God and their two inevitable results.” (ETBC, 26) In verses 7-8, the person is defined by what they “seek,” and in verses 9-10 by what they “do.”

Discuss: How does what one seeks influence what one does?

Having a list at the grocery store influences our actions in the grocery store. If I go in without a list, my current level of hunger or my desires guide my shopping. I might end up with a basket full of junk food. However, if I have a list, I will, most likely, fill my cart with the essentials for the week’s meal prep. In the first scenario, I am seeking to fulfill my desires. In the other, I am seeking to do what’s best. Similarly, if I seek to glorify God, live honorably, and prepare myself for eternity, I will live accordingly. If, on the other hand, I am seeking to please myself and fulfill my desires, I will do evil. Let’s take a moment and examine the two types of people Paul describes.

The first, described in verses 7 and 10, receives **Eternal Life**. Paul says that those in this group “seek glory, honor, and immortality in response to what God has done for them.” (ETB LG, 30) In this search, they do good. The second, described in verses 8 and 9, receives **Eternal Judgment**. This group is “self-seeking and disobey

the truth.” In this search, they do evil. We have to be careful here not to develop a soteriology (a theology of salvation) based on these four verses. It is incumbent upon us to read these verses in the context of Paul’s broader teachings. One example from the book of Ephesians reveals that one is not saved by his works but by his faith.

Read or have someone read Ephesians 2:8-9. (See Notes Box.)

To further help us understand this passage, we might ask, who is it that does good and therefore receives glory, honor, and peace? Moo presents several historical answers to this question. In the end, he settles on two as a combination. First, those who do good are those *hypothetical* people who fully keep the law. These people are hypothetical because, as Paul reveals in chapter 3 (v. 10), no one is righteous—no one can fully keep the law. Second, those who do good are Christians who’s good is the result of their union with Christ and reception of His imputed righteousness. (see NICNT, 140-141) The people Paul describes in Romans 2:7-9 are **believers and unbelievers who act in accordance with their spiritual state.**

Notes:

Eph 2:8–9.

⁸ For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift—⁹ not from works, so that no one can boast.

This passage is important for Paul’s main point in this section of the book: **Jews need Jesus too.** In our previous passage, we saw that the Jews felt their inclusion in God’s select nation would insulate them from Judgement and negate any assertion that they needed a Savior. In our current passage, God tells them to stop looking at the nation as a whole and instead look at their own lives. They will be held accountable as individuals.

We need to stop for a moment and discuss the difference between **Individual Accountability** and **Christian Individualism.**

Individual Accountability: We have already discussed this point above. To reiterate, though, Salvation is the formation of a covenant between each individual and God. The saving work of Christ is applied to the *individual* who recognizes his or her personal sinfulness, makes a *personal* decision to repent of that sinfulness, and declares Jesus as Lord of *his or her* life. The decision is based on an individual’s personal decision.

Christian Individualism: In the Western church, we struggle with individuality. This is a result of a few centuries of philosophical and cultural pollution. This Christian individualism reveals itself in questions like, “Do I really need to go to church to be a Christian?” and “Do I really need to be a part of a small group?” The answer to that question is, “No.” Theologically, salvation does not *require* church attendance. We also see this individualism play itself out in the lives of those who might say, “I am just not a people person. I can’t work on that team or committee but call me if you need something.” This is understandable because sometimes working with a team or committee can be contentious, tiresome, or slow. However, these examples demonstrate why **Christian individualism stifles our Christian discipleship process.** Let’s examine these three examples to understand this assertion.

First, **church attendance** and, more specifically, church membership are essential to discipleship. Church attendance and participation accomplish two things. First, attending weekly worship is a respite from the World. A believer who prepares their heart for worship and fully participates in worship as well as actively takes in the Word as it is preached, will receive more refreshing than a day on the lake or a lazy Sunday around the house. Moving beyond attendance, membership is also important. Yes, it is possible to be a very active church attender. Yes, joining a church can be a big step for someone coming from a different faith

tradition or someone who is coming from a difficult church situation. Membership, though, does several things. First, in many traditional, congregationalist churches (like ours), some service areas require membership. This is to ensure theological fidelity and legal protections (for the member and the body). More importantly, though, membership has personal spiritual benefits. When a person joins a church, they are putting a stake in the ground. They are saying, “I am here. I am committed. I will do my part in expanding the Kingdom from this local church.” It is a form of personal accountability.

Second, participation in **small groups** is essential to building a faith community that will help you grow in your walk. As a church grows, a small group is the place where friendships are formed through the sharing of concerns, trials, and victories. Group members can lean on each other during the good and difficult times. A small group should endeavor to be **more than a learning environment**. It should strive to become a **learning environment**.

Third, **active participation on a team or committee** is very beneficial to discipleship. First, participation in this way gives a person “skin in the game.” If you are on a team responsible for welcoming guests, you will be committed to welcoming guests. If you are on a committee responsible for stewardship/finances, you will be invested in ensuring the church and church members are good stewards of God’s resources. If you are on a team or committee responsible for maintenance of the building, you will be invested in making sure the facilities are “up to snuff.” More importantly, participation on a team or committee is a great discipling opportunity. Committee and team participation can be challenging because of the interpersonal dynamics involved. If a person views participation on these teams/committees through a spiritual lens, they can develop their Christian character. They can develop the skills of compromise, partnership, delegation, and other interpersonal skills. Working in these ways can also give a person the opportunity to become aware of old hurts and wounds that they then address through spiritual conversations and Christian partnerships.

Summarize and Transition: In this passage, Paul addressed the individual nature of our salvation. A person is saved through a personal faith commitment to the Lord, not their connection to a family or group. The Explore the Bible material reminds us that “Our eternal destiny is based on our response to God in this life.” (ETB LG, 31) While salvation is a personal decision, it is not a private matter. Believers are meant to exist in community with others. Christian individualism is damaging to our discipleship journey. Believers should make the individual decision to take their next step to possibly attend more regularly, join the church, join a small group and make it into a leaning community, or join a team or committee for the advancement of the gospel.

Apply this Content in Leading Your Small Group

While this discussion of Christian individualism may seem like a tangent from the main content of the lesson, I think the passage allowed for it in the context of a Sunday morning small group. You see, individualism can manifest as complacency. Folks get complacent about regular attendance when they focus on their *individual* attendance— “I chose not to go today because attendance is about me” instead of “I chose to go today because I am part of a body that worships and serves together.” Folks get complacent about service when they focus on individuals— “We can hire someone to do X;” “Someone else will come participate in that outreach event;” “Isn’t So-and-So paid to do that?”

Anecdotal observations and personal conversation reveal that complacency can rear its head even in a healthy church like ours. A quick look at the numbers reveals that regular weekly worship attendance has declined among church members since 2020. On average, our people *regularly* attend twice a month. Some come every week. But on average, a vast majority attend twice a month. Sometimes this is due to work requirements, and that is understandable. But that is not the case among a vast majority of attenders. Through personal conversation and observations, complacency can also rear its head in service to the church and church members. While a vast majority of people are willing to do a task when asked or even serve for an extended period when asked, that should not be the goal. The goal should be developing followers of Jesus who do not simply say yes when asked, but who see a need and ask to fill it.

Without expressing an air of judgementalism or exasperation, you can use this conversation about Christian individualism to further the **Ministry aspect of small groups**. Without addressing anyone publicly or pointing anyone out, you can encourage your group members to commit to increasing their attendance rate or taking the step to join the church. You can also encourage your group members to pursue an “official” area of service on a team or committee. You could also take a field trip around the church one day and look for needs (in the facility or in the ministry areas of the church) and commit to addressing them as a group.

3. ONE WAY (ROM. 2:12-13)

Read (or have someone read) Romans 2:12-13.

Explain: Paul again presents two types of people in verse 12: the Gentile (v. 12a) and the Jew (v. 12b). "God's judgment is for everyone regardless of how they have received the law, either on tablets or on the heart." (Exalting, 30) The focus of this section of Romans is the Jew, those who received the law on tablets. The Jews understand that *others* will experience judgment, but do not think they will because they have the law. However, what Paul reveals is that the law is the thing that will condemn them. They have heard the law, but they do not keep the law.

Discuss: Take a moment and discuss "distinctions between hearing God's words and obeying God's words." (ETB LG, 33)

Explain: The Jews had been "hearing" the law for centuries. In a lot of ways, they kept the law. However, the laws they kept were the outward-facing laws. These laws might appear to be the more strenuous: fasting, sacrifice, giving, praying at specified times. However, while keeping the outward-facing laws, they failed to keep the laws that impacted their heart and mind: loving, caring for the unwanted, guarding their heart and mental thoughts. They failed to keep these because transforming one's mind and heart is impossible (without the Spirit).

In ancient Jewish thought, "hearing" had a deeper meaning than simply letting sound waves pass over your eardrum. Hearing meant responding to what you heard. If a person does not respond to what they heard, then they did not actually hear it. I have used this example before, but it works. If a father tells a child to clean their room, but the child continues to play on their device, the father might say something like, "Son, did you hear what I said? Because if you heard me, you would be cleaning your room right now." Clearly Israel did not "hear" the law when they heard it read to them.

But what does all of this have to do with salvation through Christ? Paul is continuing to build his case: everyone, even the Jew, needs salvation through Christ. In the verses that follow, he is going to condemn them further for the failure to keep God's law. Finally, in 3:10 he will say, "There is no one righteous, not even one." And then verse 20: "For no one will be justified in his sight by the works of the law, because the knowledge of sin comes through the law." Paul is theologically correct in verse 13 when he declares that "the doer of the law will be justified." But that is the just beginning of his argument because this "doer of the law" is Moo's hypothetical sinless person we mentioned above.

We can apply this to our context in two ways. As believers, we need to share the gospel with those who might appear to be righteous. We encounter people who seem to do all the right things (like the Jews) but fail to truly keep God's law and refuse to acknowledge Him as Lord. As the ETB material explains, "Unbelievers need to understand that good works will not justify them before God." (ETB LG, 33) It is incumbent upon us to help them understand that "doing good stuff" is not enough to make them righteous before the Lord.

Also, as believers, we need to guard against acting like the Jews Paul is condemning. While we might be saved through faith in Christ, we sometimes live like the people Paul is addressing. We consistently hear the Word preached and taught but do not always truly hear it. Honestly, that is the reason the world and the broader church are in the situation they are in. Many believers today are not truly hearing and obeying the Word of God, and it is obvious in our communities and our churches. (That is the point Paul makes in the following verses; see 2:24)

Summarize and Transition: In this passage, Paul continues to build his case against the Jews. He does so not because he dislikes them. It is the opposite. He is obligated out of his love for Christ and those around him to point out sinfulness so that others will come to faith in Christ.

CONCLUDE

We began our time together talking about excuses people give. Paul reveals that mankind has no excuse. He focuses primarily on the Jew who claims that his national heritage and adherence to the outward-facing aspects of the law protect them from God's judgment. He goes on to remind them that salvation comes through a personal, individual decision to follow the Lord. Lastly, he reminds them that, like the Gentiles, they are condemned through their failure to keep God's law. Remember, Paul is spending the first 2 and a half chapters of Romans giving us the bad news of the Gospel. Next week we will finally get to the good news. Before we do that, we need to challenge ourselves.

Challenge 1: Is there someone in your life who thinks they are good enough to "go to heaven" without acknowledging Christ as Lord? You might spend some time this week praying for them and asking the Lord to allow you to share the Gospel of grace with them.

Challenge 2: Do you need to make the personal decision to take your next step in discipleship by committing more fully to the work of the Kingdom through the local church? Ask the Lord what that step is and be ready to follow Him when He answers.

Challenge 3: Do you need to commit more fully to living out the Word that is preached, taught, and revealed in the words of Scripture? Ask the Lord to help you be a doer of the Word.