

CCLEB SERMON NOTES



SUNDAY JUNE 28, 2026
ROMANS 2:1-16

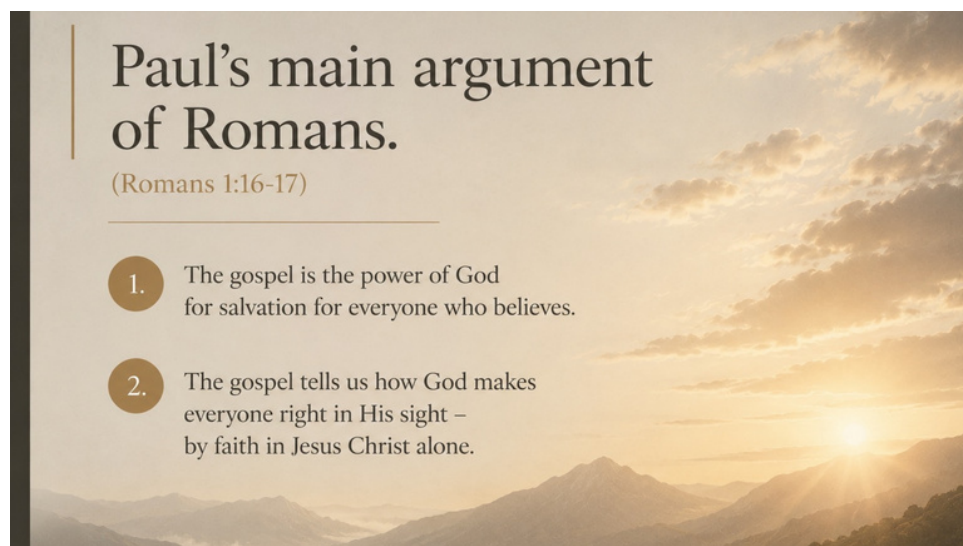
PASTOR DUANE MILLER

THE JUDGE BECOMES THE JUDGED



Jesus' church in Rome in AD 57 is seemingly divided among people groups. From the Jewish Christian perspective, it's Jews vs Gentiles. From the Roman Christian perspective, it's the civilized vs the barbarians. Paul's mission is to convince them that all people, Jews, Gentiles, civilized, barbarians are all under the gospel of Jesus Christ. And under the gospel they will be unified not divided.

To accomplish this, Paul opens with his main argument—the thesis of Romans—in **1:16-17**



Paul's main argument
of Romans.

(Romans 1:16-17)

1. The gospel is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes.
2. The gospel tells us how God makes everyone right in His sight – by faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Hold on to the word “everyone”.

Romans in outline looks like this:

Romans Outline

1. Main Argument / Thesis — Romans 1:16–17
2. Universal Need for the Gospel — Romans 1:18–3:20
3. God's Saving Action — Romans 3:21–5:21
4. Freedom and Life in the Spirit — Romans 6:1–8:39
5. Israel in God's Plan — Romans 9:1–11:36
6. Transformed - Unified Communal Life — Romans 12:1–15:13
7. Paul's Mission Appeal — Romans 15:14–16:27

Today and the next two weeks we are under point number two.

Romans 2:1-5

When the prophet Nathan confronted David for killing Uriah and sleeping with Bathsheba, he used a verbal trap to get David to condemn himself so that he would repent. His trap was a story about two men, a rich man and a poor man.

The rich man had flocks of sheep. The poor man only had one lamb. The poor man's lamb was loved and held, grew up with his kids, and was fed from the man's own plate. But then the rich man came and took and killed the poor man's lamb to serve it to a guest for dinner. You judges sitting in the audience today, how does that feel to you, right or wrong?

King David was sucked in by this terrible story. And as anticipated, as a king and a shepherd he responded strongly – both emotionally and logically, **2 Samuel 12:5-6**

This was the trap – David walked right into it, and Nathan sprung it. Nathan told David, **2 Samuel 12:7a, 9a** “You are that man!”

David was right that the grievous sin was wrong and needed justice. But in that response, he condemned himself. The judge became the judged.

Self-condemnation

requires three admissions:

- ① that something is wrong,
- ② that wrong deserves justice,
- ③ and that you yourself are guilty of it.

That is how David “condemned himself” – which led to his repentance. Repentance before God being the goal.

Paul sets up a very similar trap in **Romans 1** that gets sprung in **Romans 2:1** – which he also hopes leads to repentance.

So, what is Paul's trap? The glaring difference between Nathan's trap and Paul's is that Nathan was face to face with David when he told the story. In contrast, Paul is far from the Romans and is writing a letter to them.

For Paul's trap to work as well through a letter as Nathan's trap worked face to face, Paul uses a form of Greek writing called "diatribe" that functions like "shadow boxing".

In shadow boxing a boxer fights an imaginary opponent, anticipates the opponents moves, and reacts accordingly.

So, Paul writes this way—arguing with an imaginary opponent, anticipating their moves, countermoves, defenses and questions. This method exhorts and teaches, and Paul uses it throughout his letters.

Using that method, Paul sets the trap he hopes leads to their repentance. He builds it in **Romans 1:18-32**, the story of mankind and God.

Chapter 1 is strategically one sided to get the reader to "agree" that the long list of godlessness and wickedness Paul describes in **chapter 1**, is wrong and deserves God's justice.

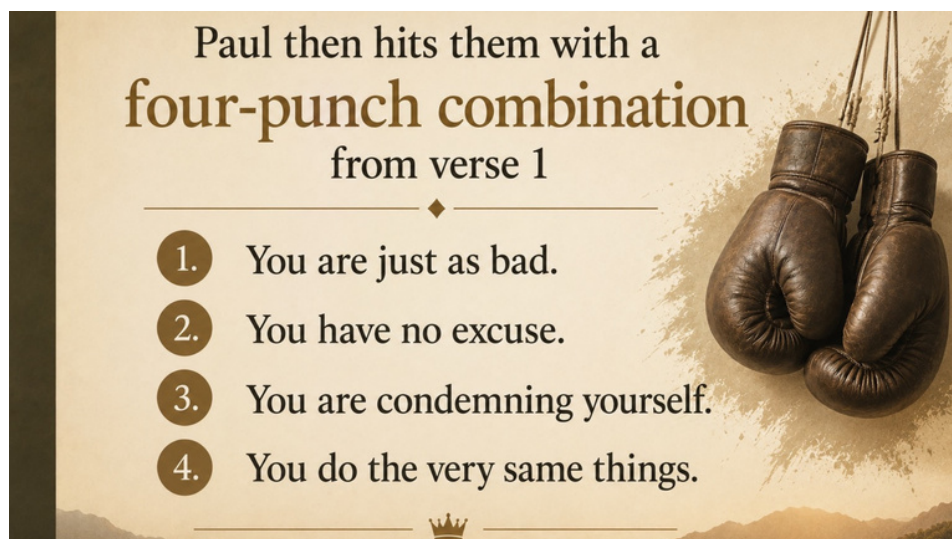
Some of that godlessness is described in **Romans 1:28-31**. When the readers read that list, and agree that it is wrong, they strongly react like David, "that is wrong and demands justice!!" In saying so, they walk into the trap and "condemn themselves"—just as Nathan wanted for David, and Paul for the Romans - to bring them to repentance.

And with the Romans in the trap, Paul then springs the trap closed **chapter 2:1. Romans 2:1**.

Note the words "you are condemning yourself". When the trap door closes the reader, goes "wait - what?" ...what just happened?

In **chapter 1** the readers were just observers and judges over this story, determining right and wrong and whether the behavior deserves God's judgment.

But in **Romans 2:1** with Paul using the word "you" 7x the readers are no longer just observers and judges, but now participants in the wrong - likewise deserving God's justice.



Paul then hits them with a
four-punch combination
from verse 1

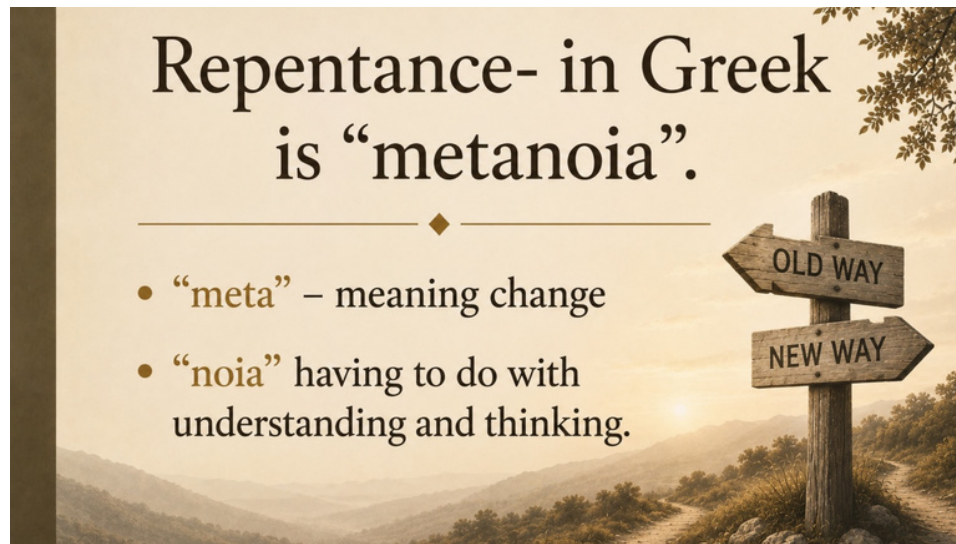
1. You are just as bad.
2. You have no excuse.
3. You are condemning yourself.
4. You do the very same things.

Paul then tells them in **verse 2** that God punishes anyone who does such things. This is consistent with the holiness and righteousness of God. Anyone, whether Jew or Gentile, Greek or uncivilized, slave or king, anyone who does these things is punished by God. Anyone.

But does the pride of the Roman readers let them see themselves falling into the "anyone" category?

NO! So, to humble them, Paul hits them with another four-punch combination – this time it is four questions. **verse 3-4**.

But look at the beautiful statement at the end of **verse 4**. God's intent for everyone is not to catch them in sin and punish them, but in his kindness to lead them to turn from their sin. To turn from your sin means to repent.



In other words, change your thinking and turn away from the wrong path you were on.

When I am on a destructive path, God's word tells me it is wrong. When I agree with God that the path is wrong that is my confession. The observer of wickedness now becomes the participant because they own their sin.

But repentance goes beyond confession. It involves changing your thinking and turning away from the path of sin—and turning back not to any old path, but to God's path, God's way.

Look what **Proverbs 12:28** says about paths.

In ancient Israel, when someone left the right path and walked the wrong path, it meant they ended up in the wilderness, halfway to dead. They called that path "wicked". But if they turned back to the right path, God's way, the path led to water, pasture, and life. That path was "righteous".

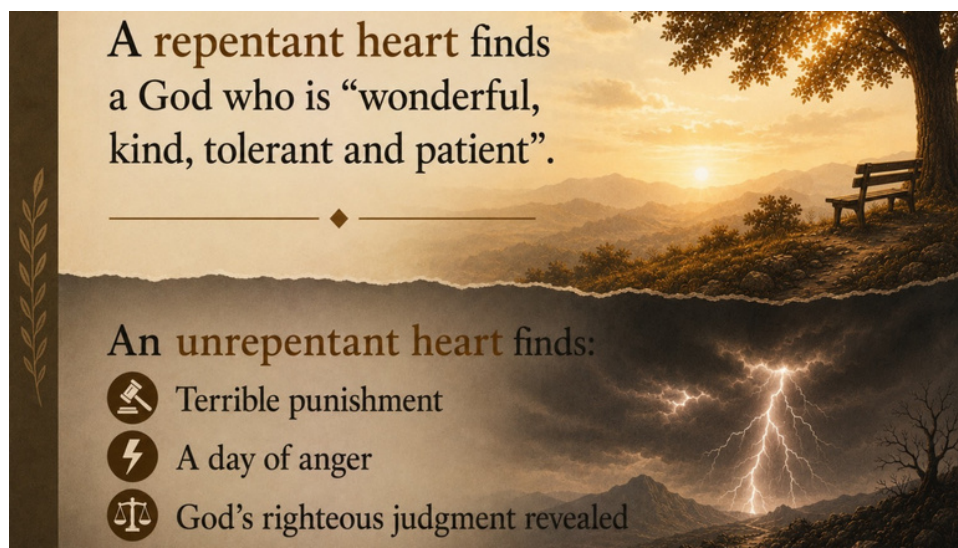
So, when **Romans 2:4** says God "intended to turn you away from sin", he wants them to turn from the wicked path to the righteous one.

Now, let's assume they repent, turning from the wicked path to righteous path. What response will they receive from God? Will they find an angry vindictive God waiting with his arms crossed and big stick in his hand?

No, Paul tells us that for the repentant heart, God is "wonderful, kind, tolerant and patient". Here is what that looks like. Luke gives us a beautiful picture of that in **Luke 15:20-24** The son was on a wicked path in the wilderness leading to death, and he repented, changed his thinking, and returned to the right path that gave him life. And there he found the loving arms of his father. Paul tells us in **Romans 2:4** that this kind response of the Father toward the repentant heart is meant to move us to repentance.

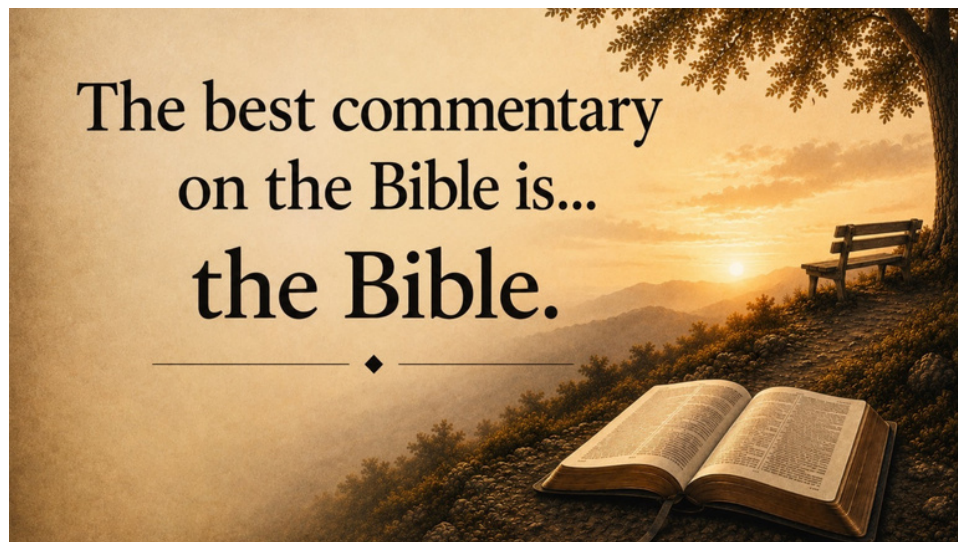
But do the Romans turn, repent? In Paul's shadow boxing letter, apparently not yet. In **verse 5** Paul describes them as "stubborn and refusing to turn". Raise your hand if you have ever been "stubborn and refusing to turn". By your own admission, you as well have just crossed from "observer to participant".

Verse 5 gives us a contrast in God's response for the unrepentant heart. Hold on to that contrast. The patience is God withholding judgment—but be aware, a day of judgement is coming.



And **verse 6** tells us those two responses are for “everyone”. Meaning God is impartial. Whether you are Greek, uncivilized, king, slave, free, Jew or Gentile you will encounter one of those two responses from God. And what controls which one you encounter is whether you repent. Are you with me?

Before we look at **Verses 7-11**, a brief lesson on biblical interpretation. You probably have heard the quote:



That means we risk misinterpretation if we read and interpret a verse all by itself. To interpret a verse correctly, we read it in the context of the passage, the book or letter, and the whole bible.

Here is how that applies to this passage. In **verse 7, 10** Paul seems to contradict himself by teaching what appears to be salvation by works, by “doing good”. **Verse 7** and **10** seem to say, that salvation comes from doing good.

But Paul has already told us God makes everyone right in His sight – by faith in Jesus Christ alone. **Romans 1:17**. By faith in Jesus, not by “doing good”. And Paul later says in **Romans 3:20**. So **Romans 2:7, 10** cannot mean that “doing good” brings righteousness.

So let’s look at **verse 6** again and this time add **verse 11** – they echo each other in meaning, and frame the verses between them, **verse 7-10**. Paul’s main point from **verse 6** and **11** is that God is not partial in how he deals with people. So does that apply to **verses 7,8,9,10** as well? Yes.

Let’s start with an easy one, skip to **verse 8-9**. Based on what is described here it makes perfect sense to us as judges that of course God is impartial and they will receive judgement.

Now look at **verse 7, 10**. In these verses Paul is telling us what the standard for eternal life is. If you pursue works righteousness—doing good perfectly—you will achieve “eternal life”, “glory, honor and peace”. And so if you are perfect, it doesn’t matter if you are Greek, Gentile, or Jew—everyone perfect makes the cut.

But Paul says later in **Romans 3:10** “No one is righteous (perfect), not even one”. That’s a quote from **Psalms 14:1-3** and **Psalms 53:1-3**

So therefore, God’s judgement is impartial, everyone is judged by the same standard, Jews first and the Gentiles. Likewise, God giving his righteousness is also impartial to those who accept it by faith, to the Jews first and to the Gentiles.

If that still doesn’t make sense and you are going “What? Huh?” you can take comfort in what Peter said of Paul in **2 Peter 3:16**, “some of his comments are hard to understand”.

In **verses 12-16** Paul explains further how God is impartial in both judgement and giving his righteousness.

Verse 12 note both people groups, the Jews and Gentiles are both judged the same. The gentiles were not given the law but are still judged for their sin. The Jews, have the law, and are likewise judged for their sin. Both judged for their sin. Interesting that “destroyed, judged” are used interchangeably.

Verse 13 explains why: Having the law and obeying the law are two different things, like knowing the speed limit versus driving it. And only obeying the law, meaning obeying it perfectly, makes us right in God’s sight. So the Jews, who have the law but didn’t obey it perfectly, are also judged and destroyed.

In **verse 14-15** Paul addresses the Gentiles and the law. Paul already said in **verse 12** that the Gentiles did not have God’s written law. But in **verse 15** Paul says even though they don’t have God’s written law physically like the Jews do, God’s law is written in their hearts.

So, the Jew who has the written law but fails to uphold the law perfectly, and the Gentile who does not have the written law but has it on their hearts – both have no excuse, both are judged by God’s law.

And then Paul adds another witness, the conscience. Paul explains that a person’s conscience, created when God made man in his image, bears witness against them when they do right or wrong.

Everyone knows what you mean by conscience, it’s the internal moral compass God has wired in every single person. And it is such a gift and such a pain. It speaks into your mind and heart about right and wrong.

However, a conscience becomes much less effective when it has been ignored repeatedly, rationalized away, or drowned in drugs, alcohol or power, money, eating...etc. Yet no one is too far gone. There are those who operate seemingly without a conscience – **Romans 1:21** describes them as “dark and confused”. But **Romans 2:16 NIV** tells us they will be judged based on their conscience. Their conscience bears witness that they are without excuse.

Paul wraps up this section, with a strong appeal that according to his gospel, judgement is coming for everyone. Paul’s gospel compels him to share the good news of Jesus Christ considering the coming judgement.

So, let’s go back to our opening line: The Judge becomes the Judged.

We have seen in Romans so far who is facing judgement:

Who is facing judgement:

1. Those who suppress the truth + refuse to obey the truth + refuse to worship God + refuse to give Him thanks.

That combination results in the list of wickedness
Romans 1:20-32.

2. Paul then says those who judge others of those wicked things are “just as bad and have no excuse”. So both the arrogant Jew and the Roman moralist who think they are better, Paul says are “just as bad and have no excuse”. God is not partial.. God judges *everyone!*

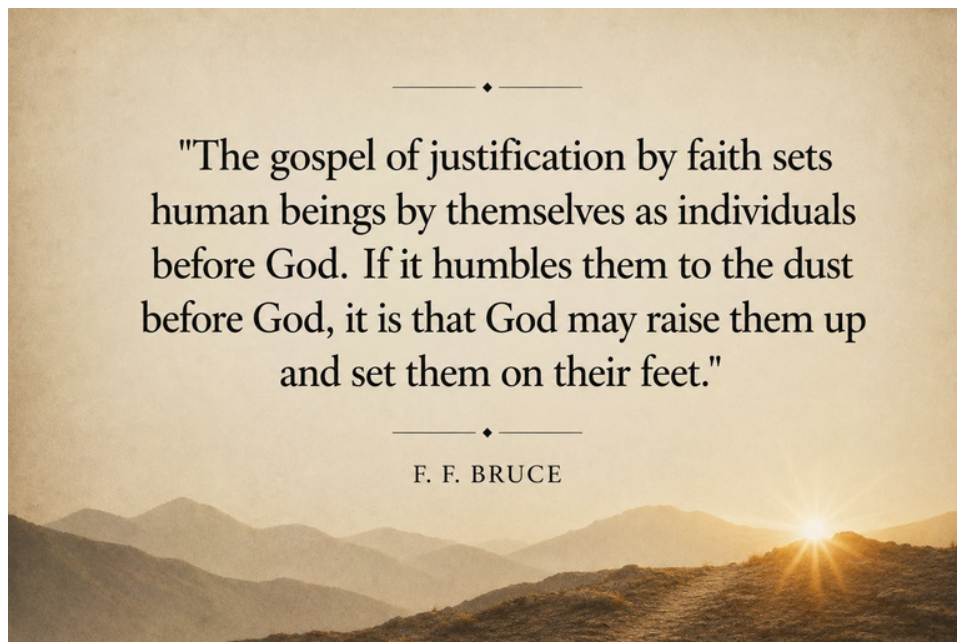
Who is facing judgement:

3. Paul then states that the Jew who has the written law and the Gentile who has the law written on their heart, are both judged equally. Again God is not partial, God judges *everyone*.

4. And fourth, all are judged by their consciences when Jesus exposes everyone’s secret thought life. All are judged, *everyone*.

Everyone will be judged. Everyone. This truth is meant to humble everyone.

F.F. Bruce says:



In humility when we agree with God that we are sinning, meaning we confess our sin, and when we change our thinking and turn away from our sin and back to God, meaning “repent”, what we face then is not judgement, but rather (**Romans 2:4**) we face a “wonderfully kind, tolerant, patient” God.

What controls whether one faces a God of judgement and destruction or a God of kindness and patience is simply repentance.

Apparently, Paul thinks the religious Jews in Rome need a little more convincing that the coming judgement applies to them, that is what next week is all about. You may be surprised that Paul writing to Jews, also applies to you and I.

So, this morning, the real question isn’t about the Jew or the Gentile, the moralist or the barbarian. The real question is about you and me. Where are you on the path right now? If God is putting his finger on a place where you’ve been quick to judge others while doing the very same things—don’t run from that. That’s not God catching you in a trap to punish you. That’s God being kind to you, doing the very thing **Romans 2:4** describes: inviting you to turn from your sin.

And you don’t have to clean yourself up first. Confession is simply agreeing with God that the path is wrong; repentance is simply turning back to him.

If that is stirring in your heart this morning, then turn—today, while it is still today. The same God who would be perfectly just to judge you is longing to be “wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient” with you. He is not standing over you with a big stick. He is the father in **Luke 15**, already running down the road with his arms wide open. Don’t harden your heart. Come home.

BONUS

CONTENT:

Romans 2:6-11 is a beautiful chiasm

The structure hinges on C/C' – the fate of the wicked at the center – with the bookends (A/A') establishing that God's judgment is perfectly impartial and based entirely on works. The inner arms (B/B') mirror each other, showing the two destinations: life for the righteous, tribulation for the evil. The repetition of "the Jew first and also the Greek" in both C' and B' is itself a deliberate parallelism reinforcing the A/A' theme of impartiality.

A – God renders to each according to his works (**verse 6**)

"He will render to each one according to his works"

B – The righteous: patient well-doing → eternal life (**verse 7**)

"To those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life"

C – The wicked: self-seeking, reject truth → wrath and fury (**verse 8**)

"But for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury"

C' – The wicked: do evil → tribulation and distress (**verse 9**)

"There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek"

B' – The righteous: do good → glory, honor, and peace (**verse 10**)

"But glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek"

A' – God shows no partiality (**verse 11**)

"For God shows no partiality"

References:

1. Craig S. Keener, IVP Bible Background Commentary: Romans, p411-450.
2. David Guzik Enduringword.com. Romans.
3. Donald Grey Barnhouse. Romans I. Man's Ruin / God's Wrath.
4. Douglas J. Moo, The Letter to the Romans, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., Second Edition., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018).
5. E. Randolph Richards. Paul and First-Century Letter Writing: Secretaries, Composition and Collection.
6. F. F. Bruce, Romans: An Introduction and Commentary, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985).
7. Jackson W. Reading Romans with Eastern Eyes, Honor and Shame in Paul's Message and Mission.
8. Tim Mackie- Bible Project, Book of Romans Summary: A Complete Animated Overview