



THE CITY GATES CHURCH

Love God. Love Others

Romans 2:1-16 **Why Being Nice Isn't Enough**

Summary: "Respectable" people are still guilty before God.

I'll bet you have at least one family member or friend who says, "I'm not very religious myself" but they're glad you are. They're polite. You like them, you trust them. They're a pretty good person. They might even share some of your political and social views and agree with you about "what's wrong with the world." But they don't think Jesus is the answer.

They're not in a moral freefall like the people described in Romans 1. You remember the flow of the chapter. Paul says that God reveals Himself to humanity, He wants to be known, but the default reaction of the human heart is to suppress what we can know about God and if that becomes a persistent habit, God gives people over to their selfish pursuits which leads into all kinds of sins epitomized by sexual sin.

Romans 1 paints a graphic, ugly, picture of a raunchy life – full of envy, murder, wickedness, deceit, and the invention of evil.

But that's not an acute description of many of the non-religious people you know.

Some of your friends and family aren't raunchy, they're respectable. They would condemn many, though not all, of the things listed in Romans 1. They might even point the finger and say, "That's what's wrong with the world today – there are too many people like that." They agree with you, things need to change.

And, it's not just the people you know personally. It's also some of the people you may have heard of or are listening to. I'm thinking of people like Jordan Peterson and Ben Shapiro - neither of them has professed faith in Christ. And yet, it seems many Christians find they can smile and nod when these men speak.

Well, there were people like Peterson and Shapiro in the ancient world too. While some Romans indulged in all forms of hedonism, pleasure-seeking, and sexual expressions, others condemned such extravagance. FF Bruce provides this description of Seneca, the philosopher and royal tutor: he exalted the great moral virtues; he exposed hypocrisy, preached the equality of all men, acknowledged the pervasive character of evil, practiced daily self-examination, ridiculed vulgar idolatry, and assumed the role of a moral guide.

Clearly, not all non-Christians are moral monsters. So, the question we're left with is: what does God think about such respectable people? What does God think of people

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living decent lives. People making a contribution to society. People who seem like "good" people?

We find the answer in Romans 2 where we learn that being nice isn't enough to save your soul. After describing the moral collapse of the raunchy man in Romans 1, Paul turns to the respectable man and says, "you're guilty too!" Read with me:

Romans 2:1 Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. **2** But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. **3** And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?

It's an unexpected turn. No doubt those who heard it first were shocked and stunned. Perhaps they had been nodding their head and agreeing as self-centered sinners were condemned in Romans One. "Of course God would condemn people like that, we all know they're heathens – they deserve God's judgment." But then, suddenly, Paul looks at the people casting judgment on everyone else and says, "you're guilty too!"

What's going on? Well, it's easy to look at other people and judge them. And it's too difficult to find people who are worse than you are and say, well, at least I'm not like them. The clearest example of this is the child molester. You can be in prison for almost anything and it's OK. But if other prisoners find out you're in for kiddie porn or child molesting, the other prisoners will come after you. Why? Because they can always tell themselves, at least I'm not like *that*, at least I didn't do *that*.

From God's perspective though, we're all criminals. We've all fallen short. It doesn't matter *which* sin you've committed, you're guilty of a sin. And frankly, more than you realize. The question is, do you see it? Do you agree? Do you admit it? Or, do you suppress the truth?

Ultimately, respectable people are just like anyone else. God reveals Himself to them, but they suppress some elements of the truth – even as they embrace other aspects. To use Paul's language, while they condemn the sins of sinners, they are still sinning themselves – maybe not in exactly the same way, or to the same extremes, but they still sin. They still miss God's mark.

It doesn't matter how much someone like Jordan Peterson defends traditional views of masculinity or how much Ben Shapiro owns the woke mob – they're guilty of their own sins too. And the same thing is true of your friend or family member who has a degree from a good school, works a good job, owns their home, doesn't drink alcohol, and volunteers a couple of times a month. The respectable person is still guilty before God and will not escape judgment.

Here's the problem though – if you're doing well in life, if you're not going around committing heinous sins, if your life isn't a mess, if it's, well, respectable, you might think

you're actually OK. You make judgments about other people but you make excuses for yourself because, "nobody's perfect" and, "we all make mistakes or have room to grow."

Well, actually, it's very, very important to know: the respectable person will face God's judgement too. God is just giving them time to repent. Read with me:

4 Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? 5 But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, 6 who "will render to each one according to his deeds":

Friends, do not miss this – according to the judgment of God the respectable person still has a **hard and impenitent heart**. They're stubborn and unrepentant. Just like sinner whose life is a mess.

Friends, whether you're a Christian or not, we've all felt this. You and I both know what it's like to have a stubborn heart. To know that we're wrong or know we need to change but we just don't want to do it, or we talk ourselves out of it, excuse it, justify it. Or we're not committed to doing it, because we like what we're doing instead or we're afraid of what will happen if we let go.

Do you remember, last week, I shared that Rosaria Butterfield, the former lesbian, now Christian, said that the real problem is not people's sexual orientation, it's their pride – no one likes to be told they're wrong and need to repent.

Well, it's the same message to the respectable person – they need to repent, and they have the same problem – pride gets in the way. They don't feel like it's true. They don't think they're that bad of a person, because, again, they're not like *that* or like *those people*.

The point here is Romans is: the raunchy and the respectable actually have more in common than they realize – they may have different symptoms, but they're both infected with the same disease. We'll talk more about this in a minute but the fact of the matter is, spiritually speaking, there are only two ways to live – you're either oriented in a God-ward direction or you're not, and everyone who resists God is headed for divine judgment.

They are (vs 5) **treasuring up wrath**.

Think about how ironic and insightful that phrase is. You're **treasuring up wrath**. Your translation may say storing up but the idea is still the same – you're stockpiling something that will be used against you.

One pastor told the story of a man who worked at a bank in the 1880s and found a way to steal a single silver dollar a day. He would take them home each night and store

them in his attic. He went on doing this for several years, acquiring 20lbs of silver coins each year, until one night as he slept the boards of the attic gave way and the weight of the silver came crushing down on the man as he lay in bed sleeping and killed him.

That's what life is like for some people – you're collecting things, treasuring things, storing up things, that will eventually be your downfall and demise.

But in the meantime, it seems OK, it seems like you're getting away with it. It seems like either God doesn't know, or God doesn't mind, or maybe there isn't even a God, because you've never gotten spiritually schwacked for anything.

That's not because you're innocent. It's because God offers you a different kind of riches. You're **treasuring** up wrath, while, look at verse 4, God offers: **the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering**, He's trying to **lead you to repentance** through His **goodness**.

My friend, which one do you want to collect?

God wants to make you rich – but not with the things you think make riches. He wants your life to be marked by His kindness, restraint, and patience. He is trying to woo you and win you.

You are going to fail. You are going to comprise. There will be times when you don't live up to your own expectations of yourself, much less God's standards. But He gives you space and time to recognize what you've done, turn away from it, and ask for forgiveness and help.

None of us could survive if God immediately punished us for our wrongs. We benefit from His self-control – that He doesn't come unhinged and start throwing things at us, but instead, He shows us **His goodness**.

Why would He do that? Why would God be so patient with us? Maybe it's because it's something He wants to see more of in the world. Maybe, just maybe, God wants you to receive this kind of treatment SO THAT you learn how to reflect it to others.

What would the world look like if more of your relationships were characterized by goodness and patience? What if the relationships where there is already goodness and patience had even more?

Christian, **goodness** and **patience** are fruit of the Holy Spirit – they're not just things God wants to give to us, they're also things He wants to produce in us over time as we spend more time with Him.

If you have a short fuse or temper with someone – and to be clear, I mean someone who *has done wrong*, someone who is not listening or obeying, someone whose conduct has not been acceptable – there is something very difficult for you to consider

here. If God is [patient](#) with them, and is intentionally [good](#) to them *with the intent that such goodness will lead to repentance*, how should you mirror that as well?

This is a very, very, hard thing to do, I want to admit that. But it is a very, very Christian thing to do as well.

You're not saying they're innocent. You're not saying they're not wrong. You're not saying they don't need to change. They are, absolutely, wrong and they do need to change, but is being mad at them, or giving them the cold shoulder, isolating or withdrawing from them, letting them know how displeased you are, is that reflecting anything of what you personally experience from God, or what God is showing them, and does it actually lead to durable change?

Yes, change is necessary. [Repentance](#) is the goal. But what's the best way to get there and how might showing [kindness](#) to them inspire it? That's a really, really, difficult question to answer. It will have real consequences for you. But it will also draw you closer God as you seek His help in looking like Him.

So, if you need to fuel your attitude and actions in this area, reflect on God's own goodness and patience with you. Remember how long He loved you as your life, attitude, and approach slowly changed. Look back over the course of your life – can you praise God for being patient with you?

OK, but what if [kindness](#) doesn't lead to [repentance](#)? Well then, remember that [wrath](#) is being stored up for judgment if no change occurs. God will not wipe away guilt if forgiveness isn't sought.

Once again, at the end of the day, there are really only two ways to live – you're either oriented toward God, or you're not and those two orientations lead in two different directions. Back up with me to Romans 2, verse 6 and notice God:

6 ... "will render to each one according to his deeds":
7 eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; 8 but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth [we might add, even though they have been shown goodness and patience], but obey unrighteousness— [to them will be] indignation and wrath, 9 tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; 10 but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 11 For there is no partiality with God.

It doesn't matter if your life seems respectable or raunchy – the real question is: who sets your agenda and your goals? Are you seeking yourself or are you seeking God and His ways?

Do you persistently do good and seek God or is your life more often marked by the choice to do what you want? Do you live a surrendered life?

Here's the problem I think we face in Northern Virginia – we want to baptize respectable people and respectable things even if they don't repent and give them a pass because we want to get along peaceably, and we think these people are helpful to us.

I'd bet, sexual sins aside, that there's a greater pull on your life toward respectability than there is toward raunchiness. You are more likely to find yourself wanting to hang out with people like those described here in chapter two than the people described in chapter one. But let me remind you - neither of them put Jesus first.

Ben Shapiro and Jordan Peterson and your friend or family member can do a lot of good things, even take a stand against a lot of bad things. They can make good arguments and even be a respectable role-model at times. You may be able to learn from them, you may even admire them. But if they **do not obey the truth**, they are headed for **tribulation and anguish** at the day of judgment.

Life is not about building a moral resume. You either live for God and His Kingdom and His purposes right here, right now or you don't. You either live according to your own purposes, seeking whatever you have determined you need or want or value, or you seek God. One or the other is the dominant theme in your life – it doesn't matter what it looks like from afar – whether respectable or raunchy.

Church, don't be distracted by respectable people. Love them. You can even learn from them and listen to them – they may have some helpful things to say, but do not become their disciples. They're not headed where you are headed. If you are in Christ, and they are not, they need what you have and not vice-versa.

If you're a Christian this morning, God's wants you and the world needs you to be **patient** in **continuing to do good**.

I feel like I need to emphasize that word for some of you. Maybe you need to underline it in your Bible, but I have the sense that this is God's message to some of you this morning – you've been doing well. Or at least you're trying. You're trying to do good and be good. Maybe in your own life, maybe in your circumstances, maybe showing it to others. You want to do the right thing, you want to please God.

His gentle, encouraging word to you this morning is: be **patient**, and keep going. **Continue doing good**. You might not see the results yet. That's OK. He doesn't always see immediate results either, but remember, His **kindness leads to repentance**. He's not going to break you. He sees you and He knows.

Isaiah the prophet said of the Messiah:

Isaiah 42:3 *A bruised reed He will not break,
And smoking flax He will not quench,*

That's a poetic way of saying God is gentle and merciful. He's not demanding more of you. He knows you don't have much strength. He knows you don't have much to give. He sees what you're doing. The smallest flower brings Him pleasure. Keep going, [patiently](#) continue. There is [glory and honor, peace and immortality](#) ahead.

And – good news! – anyone can find it – if they will just submit themselves to God, which brings us to the last thing we need to consider this morning – is it possible for someone to be respectable enough to please God? Is it possible to truly be a good person on your own? We read

[12 For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law 13 \(for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; 14 for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, 15 who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them\) 16 in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.](#)

OK, lots of words there and I'm sure they raise lots of questions, so let's work our way through it.

The first thing you need to know is the difference between Jews and Greeks or Jews and Gentiles as they are sometimes called.

The Roman Empire conquered the Greek Empire but kept a lot of their original culture. So, when Paul says the [Greeks](#), he's referring to everyone in Rome who was not ethnically or culturally Jewish whether they were from the Middle East, Europe, or Africa.

The Jews are the descendants of Abraham. God chose him and made a special covenant with him. God gave him the land of Israel and descendants who became known as the nation of Israel. Over time God revealed more and more of Himself to these people who wrote down what they received in Scripture including the Law which is generally contained in the first five books of the Bible, as special instructions for how to live and worship as God's special people in God's special place – the Promised Land.

In other words, the Jews knew, clearly knew, what God expected. The question was: would they do it? And I think you know the answer, because you and I also know what we should do, and we don't always do it. Sometimes, having all the answers just makes things worse because you don't really have an excuse.

But what if you didn't have access to the Scriptures? What if you grew up without access to the truth about the God of Creation? What if you never knew the name of Yahweh or Jesus? Would you just do whatever you want and live in a complete moral cesspool?

Sometimes the answer is yes. We see that throughout history and it's what we see in Romans 1. If people have the access and ability, sometimes they will plunge headlong into hedonism and selfish, raunchy desires, and God will give them over to it. But not always. Sometimes people will do the right thing.

That shouldn't be too surprising. Remember the whole argument of Romans 1 is that God reveals Himself to people all over the world and all throughout history. We don't have time to get into all the details but you can go back and review an earlier sermon on our podcast or in the app when we discussed the ways God communicates – from Creation which tells us there had to be a designer behind the way the world works to our conscience which tells us things we should and shouldn't do. All people have someone or something in their lives pointing them to the truth about God – even if they don't have the Law, or the Scriptures.

And sometimes, people live in alignment with what they know through their conscience. So, it is possible for some people, at some times, to do some things that the Law commands without even knowing it.

The next logical question then would be, is that enough for them to be saved? In other words, “what about the Pygmy in Africa, or the Bedouin in the desert, who hasn't heard the gospel?” Well, in his commentary on this passage David Guzik notes: in theory, a man might be justified (“excused”) by obeying his conscience. Unfortunately, at some point everyone has violated their conscience..., just as everyone has violated God's written [Word].”

We might imagine a person living out in some remote area and living a totally innocent, righteous, and respectable life, but experience doesn't support it. We all, at some point, go against what we know is good and right and true. And that's why the good news of the gospel also comes with a Great Commission – that we who know would then go out into all the world and make disciples of all the nations - because all people are sinners, and all people need to be saved.

Here's the bottom line – to quote a verse that will come up in the next chapter – [all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God](#) (Romans 3:23). Your fall might look raunchy or it might seem respectable, but if you're not surrendered to Jesus, you're destined for judgment.

As we close today, I urge you to reflect on your relationship with Jesus. No matter where you find yourself, God's grace is available.

If you feel you've been 'treasuring up wrath,' know that repentance is always possible, and God's kindness leads us to change.

Ultimately, whether you see yourself as respectable or struggling or already saved by grace, the call is the same: surrender fully to Christ. Seek His Kingdom, repent where needed, and live a life that reflects His patience and goodness here and now. Let's pray.



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Romans 2:1-16

Why Being Nice Isn't Enough

Summary: "Respectable" people are still guilty before God.

1. Respectability

- In what ways have you seen people exhibit "respectable" behavior that still lacks a genuine relationship with Christ? How can we distinguish between true faith and mere outward morality?

- How can we lovingly engage with those who appear respectable but do not have a relationship with Jesus?

- Share a personal experience where you realized you were relying on outward respectability rather than a heart transformation. How did you address it?

2. Storing Up Wrath vs. Embracing God's Goodness

- What does it mean to "store up wrath" in a practical sense?

- How can we actively choose to embrace God's goodness and patience instead? What changes might that involve in our daily lives?

3. Reflecting God's Patience

- How does God's patience with us challenge the way we interact with others who may be struggling with their own issues?

- Discuss a situation where showing patience and kindness led to a positive change. What did you learn from that experience?

4. The Role of Good Works in the Christian Life

- Paul speaks about "doing good" as part of seeking God. How do you balance the need for good works with the understanding that salvation is by grace alone?

5. Encouraging Patience and Perseverance

- How does the message of being patient in doing good resonate with your current life situation? What areas in your life require more patience and perseverance?

- How can we support each other in continuing to do good and waiting on God's timing? What practical steps can we take together?

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