

ROMANS

Chapter 2

God's Righteous Judgment

Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. 2 We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. 3 Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? 4 Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? 5 But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. 6 He will render to each one according to his works: 7 to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; 8 but for those who are self-seeking[a] and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. 9 There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, 10 but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. 11 For God shows no partiality.

Ch 2 Luther: “In chapter 2 [Paul] extends his rebuke to include those who seem outwardly to be righteous and who commit their sins in secret.... This is the nature of all hypocrites, to think of themselves as pure, and yet to be full of covetousness, hatred, pride, and all uncleanness, Matthew 23[:25–28]. These are they who despise God’s goodness, and in their hardheartedness heap wrath upon themselves. Thus St. Paul, as a true interpreter of the law, leaves no one without sin, but proclaims the wrath of God upon all who would live well simply by nature or of their own volition. He makes them to be no better than the obvious sinners; indeed, he says they are stubborn and unrepentant” (AE 35:372–73). (TLSB)

2:1–16 In this section Paul sets forth principles that govern God’s judgment. God judges (1) according to truth (v. 2), (2) according to deeds (vv. 6–11) and (3) according to the light a person has (vv. 12–15). These principles lay the groundwork for Paul’s discussion of the guilt of the Jews (vv. 17–29). (CSB)

2:1 *no excuse.* Paul’s teaching about judging agrees with that of Jesus, who did not condemn judging as such, but hypocritical judging. (CSB)

passing judgment. A warning that had special relevance for Jews, who were inclined to look down on Gentiles because of their ignorance of God’s revelation in the OT and because of their immoral lives. (CSB)

Jews or Greeks who condemned the idolatry and immorality presented in 1:18–32. (TLSB)

Many of Paul’s contemporaries, both Gentile and Jew, would assent to his indictment of the pagan world; many a pious Jew and serious-minded Greek would concur in his proclamation of divine judgment upon a culture and a history that was religiously and morally out of joint. These men would thereby exempt themselves from the judgment of God proclaimed by Paul and would feel secure in their ethical superiority to the libertine, the pervert, and the antisocial criminal. As long as man still has the righteousness and pride and strength to judge his fellowman, he is not

ready for the beggary of faith, he is not ready to receive the radical rescue of the righteousness of God. (Franzmann)

The apostle distinguishes three classes of unrighteous men. Some serve un-chastity and unrighteousness, disregarding their conscience and without thinking of excusing and justifying their evil deeds. Other do the same and defend, gloss over and praise what, as they well know, is perverse and worthy of death. There is yet a third class of men who, on the contrary, rebuke and condemn evil, but only in others, not in themselves. (Stoeckhardt)

2:2 practice...things – God’s law wants doers and His judgment strikes men’s deeds; His judgment is not affected by the pious, serious, ethical words with which men cover up their deed. (Franzmann)

Sins discussed in 1:18–32. (TLSB)

we know. An expression Paul frequently used that assumed the persons addressed agreed with the statement that followed (see 3:19; 7:14; 8:22, 28; 1Co 8:1, 4; 2Co 5:1; 1Ti 1:8). (CSB)

God’s judgment – God’s judgment is just and warranted (cf v 5). (TLSB)

His judgment falls “rightly,” in accordance with the facts, according to the truth. (Franzmann)

2:3 Jesus also condemned this attitude (Mt 7:3; cf. Lk 18:9). (CSB)

Paul knows how adroit we ethical gentlemen are at evading the truth. He hunts us down in the coverts of our self-deception. Each man considers himself the great exception; his sin is somehow less sinful because it is his, and he will escape the judgment of God. This is a completely irrational egoism; and once it is put into words, it stands convicted by its folly. But is impious folly, for it assumes that God will, after all, be something less than a righteous Judge, an all-seeing Judge, a Judge from whose avenging presence none can flee. (Franzmann)

2:4 presume on you – “Think little of” or “despise.” (TLSB)

God’s kindness - The purpose of God’s kindness is to bring about repentance (2Pe 3:9). The Jews had misconstrued his patience to be a lack of intent to judge. (CSB)

forbearance – Patiently withholding judgment. (TLSB)

Man sees in God’s long patience with the sinner a toleration of his sin, and he grows secure in this delusion. There is contempt for God in this misreading of His purposes. It ignores the fact that God’s forbearance is meant to give man room and scope for repentance, not “one more midnight to be free” (2 Peter 3:9, 15). (Franzmann)

repentance – God has not immediately punished sin; He wants sinners to repent and be forgiven. (TLSB)

2:5 because of your hard and impatient heart – A hard heart does not respond to God, but refuses to repent. Cf Ex 4:21. (TLSB)

This toying with God’s patience, this desecration of His love, is the man of a hard and impenitent heart. (Franzmann)

storing up wrath – Unforgiven sins will be punished on Judgment Day. (TLSB)

That misused love of His will become a charged accumulation of wrath which the righteous Judge will visit on the desecrator's head. (Franzmann)

day of God's wrath. Judgment at the end of time in contrast to the judgment discussed in 1:18–32. (CSB)

God's judgment will be perfectly fair and appropriate. (TLSB)

He heaps sin upon sin; he misuses the rich gifts of divine goodness to satisfy his carnal lusts; he utilizes the time of divine patience and longsuffering for evil-doing. (Stoekhardt)

2:6–7† Paul is not contradicting his continual emphasis in all his writings, including Romans, that a person is saved not by what he does but by faith in what Christ does for him. Rather, he is discussing the principle of judgment according to deeds (see note on vv. 1–16). Judgment will be rendered according to one's deeds in the sense that the good works of the believer give evidence that he has faith. Good works, which are seen, give evidence of faith, which is unseen. (CSB)

2:6 *render to each...to his works* – Deeds described here are only found in Christ. Cf 3:21–30. (TLSB)

2:7 *patience in well-doing* – Does not mean that we are justified by our works. Chs 1–2 clearly indicate that we all have sinned and are incapable of saving ourselves. People are only good in God's sight when they are justified by Christ. Apart from Christ, vv 7, 10, and 13 might lead self-righteous readers to think that they are capable of perfect obedience, of earning salvation. Paul will confront them with evidence showing that this is impossible (cf Mt 19:16–22). (TLSB)

He speaks more precisely and fully of the motives that produce the works than the products. (Franzmann)

2:8 *who are self-seeking* – He is like the son in the parable who demanded what was coming to him and left his father's house for a distance country. (Franzmann)

obey unrighteousness. Those who base life not on God but on sinful things. (TLSB)

2:9 *will be tribulation and distress* – Gk *thlipsis*, affliction or troubles from outside oneself. (TLSB)

Jew first. With spiritual privilege comes spiritual responsibility (see Am 3:2; Lk 12:48). (CSB)

Not in value, but in time or sequence. The covenant was first made with the ancestors of the Jews, who were to take the covenant to the Gentiles (cf Is 19:18–25). The Messiah appeared in Israel, but commissioned His Church to make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:18–20). The Gospel first came to the Jews, then the Gentiles (1:16). If either reject the Gospel, they will be judged. (TLSB)

If the Jew misused this his priority in the grace of God, he has a priority in punishment.
(Franzmann)

2:10 *who does good* – What will determine salvation and damnation on that Day are faith and unbelief. Faith however, of necessity brings forth good fruits. (Stoekhardt)

2:11 A basic teaching of both the OT and the NT. (CSB)

shows no partiality – God does not favor one people over another. He judges all by the Law and always saves people by the Gospel. (TLSB)

2:1–11 When we pass judgment on another, we condemn ourselves (v 1). It is easy to recognize and condemn sin in others while overlooking our own sin. Paul’s teachings are clear: all have sinned. Without God’s patience and forbearance, we would all be condemned. • O God, thank You that our Savior, Jesus, has redeemed us! Send us forth today to proclaim this Good News. Amen. (TLSB)

God's Judgment and the Law

12 For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. 13 For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. 14 For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. 15 They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them 16 on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus. 17 But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God 18 and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law; 19 and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, 20 an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth— 21 you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? 22 You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? 23 You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. 24 For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.” 25 For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. 26 So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded[b] as circumcision? 27 Then he who is physically[c] uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code[d] and circumcision but break the law. 28 For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. 29 But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

2:12 *law*. The Mosaic law. “All who sin apart from the law” refers to Gentiles. God judges according to the light available to people. Gentiles will not be condemned for not obeying a law they did not possess. Their judgment will be on other grounds (see 1:18–20; 2:15; cf. Am 1:3–2:3). (CSB)

Gentiles did not have the revealed Law, the Torah. (TLSB)

perish ... judged. Synonyms; sin merits death. (TLSB)

by the law. Having received the Torah, the Israelites were bound to keep it, but failed to do so. (TLSB)

He proclaims that judgment according to works means judgment on the sinner; all who have sinned will perish, each man being judged on the basis of the revelation which God has given him. The deed is what counts and decides, no matter whether it was done by a Jew who had the Law or by a Gentile who had it not. (Franzmann)

2:13 *hearers...doers* – Hypothetical statement. One who could keep the Law perfectly might be justified, but this is impossible because all people sin. We can be justified only by grace apart from our works (cf 3:28). (TLSB)

righteous before God.† At God's pronouncement of acquittal on judgment day. (CSB)

2:14 *by nature.* By natural impulse without the external constraint of the Mosaic law. (CSB)

Because of God's created order, the Gentiles know right and wrong without the assistance of God's revealed Word. However, sin has corrupted their understanding. (TLSB)

do what the law requires. Does not mean that pagans fulfilled the requirements of the Mosaic Law but refers to practices in pagan society that agreed with the law, such as caring for the sick and elderly, honoring parents and condemning adultery. (CSB)

are a law to themselves. The moral nature of pagans, enlightened by conscience (v. 15), functioned for them as the Mosaic law did for the Jews. (CSB)

The conscience shows their sinfulness and need for a Savior. (TLSB)

2:15 *written in their hearts* – Just as God partially reveals Himself in nature (1:19), He gives all people some knowledge of His Law. "The Ten Commandments are written in all people's hearts" (LC II 67). (TLSB)

The Gentiles' deeds are thus a witness to the fact that they know the will of God. The operation of their conscience is a second witness to the fact that they have within them something that enables them to call right and wrong. (Franzmann)

conscience also bear witness. The conscience makes one feel guilty when it is violated, but it also makes one feel that certain actions are right. (TLSB)

2:16 This verse should be read with v. 13, as the parentheses around vv. 14–15 indicate. (CSB)

God judges ... by Christ. God judges us in view of our relationship to Christ. (TLSB)

secrets of men. God judges thoughts, motives, and actions. (TLSB)

2:17–24 The presentation takes the form of a dialogue. Paul knew how a self-righteous Jew thought, for he had been one himself. He cites one advantage after another that Jews considered to be unqualified assets. But those assets became liabilities when there was no correspondence between profession and practice. Paul applied to the Jew the principles of judgment set forth in vv. 1–16. (CSB)

2:17 *call yourself a Jew.* Paul's attention turns from Gentiles to Jews, who are proud of their heritage. (TLSB)

boast in God. This may be done appropriately (2Co 10:17) or in a self-righteous way that belittles others (cf Lk 18:9–14). (TLSB)

2:18 *know His will.* By knowing the Scriptures. (TLSB)

instructed from the law – Gk *katecheo*, “catechized.” Believers were taught God's Word. (TLSB)

2:19–20 *the blinds.* Gentiles, to whom Jews regarded themselves as vastly superior because they (the Jews) possessed the Mosaic law. (CSB)

2:19 *light to those who are in darkness* – Those spiritually enlightened by God's Word could lead others in this dark world. (TLSB)

2:20 *children.* Those with an immature knowledge due to age or ignorance. (TLSB)

embodiment of knowledge and truth. Believing themselves to have perfect knowledge and the ability to use it appropriately. (TLSB)

2:21 *you steal.* See Ac 19:37. Large amounts of wealth were often stored in pagan temples. (CSB)

Some Jews stole from pagan temples to show their contempt for idolatry, but this violated the Seventh Commandment. (TLSB)

2:23 *boast about the law* – Pride in being a Jew and having the Law that others lacked. (TLSB)

2:24 Israel's failures caused the Gentiles to mock and blaspheme God. Here the hypocritical actions of Jews give rise to similar blasphemy. (TLSB)

2:25 *Circumcision.* A sign of the covenant that God made with Israel (see Lev 12:3) and a pledge of the covenant blessing. The Jews had come to regard circumcision as a guarantee of God's favor. (CSB)

Outward sign of God's covenant with the Jews (Gn 17:10–14). (TLSB)

your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. Outward signs without faith are worthless. (TLSB)

The Jew speaks his Amen to the promise of God by obeying the law of God. If man breaks the Law, his circumcision cannot save him; it indicts him. (Franzmann)

2:26 *precepts of the law.* Things required by the Law. (TLSB)

regarded as circumcision? Circumcision was synonymous with God's OT people, Israel. (TLSB)

2:27 If a Gentile's deeds excelled those of a Jew in righteousness, that very fact condemned the Jew, who had an immeasurably better set of standards in the law of Moses. (CSB)

written code and circumcision – Revealed Law, the Torah. (TLSB)

2:28 *outwardly* – Following ceremonial laws such as circumcision or kosher regulations. (TLSB)

nor is circumcision outward. Covenant was not about a physical act but about faith. (TLSB)

2:29 *matter of the heart* – God called His people to faith. Outward ceremonies were not an end in themselves. (TLSB)

by the Spirit. The true sign of belonging to God is not an outward mark on the physical body, but the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit within—what Paul meant by “circumcision of the heart” (see Dt 30:6). (CSB)

by the letter – Many followed the Law in detail, though they lacked genuine faith in God’s forgiveness through the Messiah, Jesus. (TLSB)

His praise. Humans may be impressed by outward acts, but God sees the heart and motives. (TLSB)

2:12–29 Paul warns against being praised by people but not by God (v 29). Pride desires recognition and praise from the world, but this may come in ways that are inconsistent with God’s will. Our priorities are misplaced when we seek the world’s acclaim. We are blessed when we place God first, knowing He loves and forgives us. He approves of us because of Jesus. That’s all the praise we will ever need. • Heavenly Father, in faith I do not seek the praise of the world, but I rejoice in Your gifts. Amen. (TLSB)