Romans 2

"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. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things.

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? Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? 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, who 'will render to each one according to his deeds': eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God.

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 (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; 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, 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) in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.

Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, 'Do not commit adultery,' do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? For 'the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,' as it is written.

For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law? For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God" (Romans 2:1–29).

Section 1

The Self-Righteous

Having made his case for the depravity of a rebellious sin-practicing people, Paul addressed the so-called "righteous."

There were individuals in Rome (as there are everywhere today) who pointed out the sins of others but refused to see their own. Paul called this *"inexcusable"* (vs. 1a). It is easy to see the speck in another person's eye while failing to see the plank in one's own (see Matthew 7:1–5 and Luke 6:39–42).

The judgmental person's sin(s) are of little difference from the flagrantly wicked. Therefore, *"whoever you are who judge…you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things"* (vs. 1b abridged). Moreover, "*we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things* (vs. 2).

The self-righteous had/have ignored the fact that their self-exalted position as the judge of others would/will by no means excuse the equally guilty from judgment. Therefore, Paul's stern rebuke should be heeded: *"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?"* (vs. 3).

Stop and Think

Someone might suggest, "I am not committing adultery," or "I am not gossiping," and/or "I'm not a murderer." However, not actively engaging in specific acts does not leave a person without equal guilt before God.

The man or woman claiming to be free of adultery while engaging in lust for another person, complaining about their spouse while seeking comfort in another person, or even failing to provide the love, nurturing, and provisions required in a strong marriage, is violating their marriage covenant—and therefore just as guilty (in the eyes of God) as the one who openly commits the physical act of adultery (see James 3:1–12, Matthew 5:28, 1 Corinthians 7:3).

A man or woman who holds bitterness and hate for another person is categorically said to be a murderer—though not physically committing the act (see 1 John 3:15).

A man or woman who refrains from *speaking* destructively and/or condescendingly of others, but *thinks* judgmentally nonetheless, is just as guilty as if they had spoken the words (see Proverbs 23:7).

A man or woman who has not, or does not, place God in His rightful place has committed idolatry (see Exodus 20:3).

No Sliding Scale

Those who compare themselves among themselves are unwise (2 Corinthians 10:12). God is the righteous judge; He sees all, knows all, and is the only one who can provide correct evaluation. Moreover, our judgment of others (by comparison among men) fails to see that God's judgment is not on a sliding scale. He is the standard and has used the Law to prove that none are righteous.

Therefore, the judgmental should humble themselves and do the needed self-examination by comparison with God as the standard. Anyone who does takes Paul's command seriously.

The fact that those who are genuinely born again will not suffer the wrath of God is certain (1 Thessalonians 5:9). However, believers need reminding… They (we) are saved by grace and must remember that others are too! God has been patient with us. We must be patient with others.

God does know the spiritual condition of every person and will rightly judge everyone individually. *"There is no partiality with God"* (vs. 11). Therefore, those who see themselves as better than others harm the others

they judge—and themselves. We all need the Savior. We are all judged by the same standard. Therefore, we all must come humbly to Christ—appropriately responding to the Gospel.

Section 2

The Law—Given to the Jews

Paul explained that those who know the Law are all the more accountable for their sin. Therefore, the Jews (to whom the Law was given) have the greater responsibility.

Those who know nothing about the Law are nonetheless guilty—based upon the grace and illumination provided them by God. All are sinners. All are guilty! Therefore, rather than being judgmental of others whom we perceive as worse than we are, we should see one another in the light of God's holiness—recognizing the need we all have for a savior. Moreover, we should recognize that God's patience with man, during this season of grace, should lead us to our own repentance rather than to self-proclaimed righteousness. Paul asked, *"do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?"* (vs. 4).

May we all value the goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering of God—and come to genuine God-gifted repentance.

Contemplations About the False Assumptions Concerning the Goodness and Patience of God

Because God is patient, men falsely suggest that:

1) God lacks the ability to <u>*see*</u> sin—as if He is not omnipresent and omniscient. However, *"The eyes of the Lord are in every place beholding the evil and the good*" (Proverbs 15:3).

2) God lacks the ability to <u>*judge*</u> sin—as if He is not omnipotent. However, "…Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth'" (Matthew 28:18).

3) God has changed His standards or is aloof about sin—as though He is careless or has no desire to judge. However, *"God is a just judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day. If he does not turn back, He will sharpen His sword; He bends His bow and makes it ready. He also prepares for Himself instruments of death; He makes His arrows into fiery shafts. Behold, the wicked brings forth iniquity; Yes, he conceives trouble and brings forth falsehood. He made a pit and dug it out, and has fallen into the ditch which he made. His trouble shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down on his own crown"* (Psalm 7:11–16).

"When Abraham was interceding for Sodom he said, *'Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?'"* (Genesis 18:25).

But note:

1) God allows man time to repent, while also allowing unrepentant man to store up for themselves wrath for the day of wrath. God is not mocked. Therefore, Paul wrote those in Rome teaching that, *"in*

accordance with [their] hardness and [their] impenitent heart[s] [they were] treasuring up for [themselves] wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (vs. 5). The injunction applies to everyone today as it did to those in first-century Rome.

God will judge according to truth—not assumption or appearance. God will judge all men impartially. God will judge by Jesus. He is the judge—and the standard of judgment. God will judge by the Gospel.

2) The goodness/kindness of God is a demonstration of His patience—as He waits for the precious fruit of the earth. *"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance"* (2 Peter 3:9).

God is longsuffering with us. He has patiently allowed for our growth. He is good to us! Therefore, we should humbly respond to His loving call to repentance. Moreover, we are called to longsuffering and patience with others. Freely we have received—freely give!

Let it be known: God sees all, knows all, and is the righteous judge who will vindicate His holy name. He does what is right, is just, and is the only one who can vindicate the sinner in mercy. May we all be aware of the fact that those who "treasure" their sin, are "*treasuring up for [themselves] wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God who 'will render to each one according to his deeds'"* (vss. 5–6).

We should note that God will judge everyone according to their deeds. However, the believer is judged based upon the "deed" we have done, namely that of placing our faith and trust in Jesus without any reflection of remembrance of our sins (see Hebrews 8 and 10:14–18). However, unbelievers will be judged by their works—the bad "deeds" done—including their rejection of Christ (see John 3:16–18 and 5:24).

Some Were Addressed—All Are Guilty

"Those" being addressed were identified in the singular "you." This indicates that Paul was intending a personal application within the whole of all addressed. There were none within the group who were without sin, and therefore none who were able to escape the application.

Paul's method of communication did not suggest that all were guilty of the same things (as the singular might be used to indicate). Paul was building a case against all—as we will discover in chapter 3. Moreover, his application applied to both the Jews and the Gentiles.

Life or Death

God has promised *"eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality"* (vs. 7). Moreover, He has promised that *"those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness*—[will suffer] *indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish"* (vss. 8–9a). He applied this to "*every soul of man who does evil of the Jew first and also of the Greek"* (vs. 9b).

Indeed, the *"glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek"* [is provided without hypocrisy] (vs. 10). *"For there is no partiality with God"* (vs. 11). God requires both Jew and Gentile to respond to Jesus as Savior!

Clarity

The *"doing good"* here is the necessity to turn from unbelief to faith and from self-righteousness to humility—in recognition of our need for a Savior: Jesus. It does not suggest that believers should tolerate judgmental behavior, nor does it suggest that we who have wrongfully passed judgment on others are going to suffer the *"indignation and wrath"* of God or forfeit the salvation He has given. Paul is simply building his case for the sinfulness of man and documenting the sins of the Romans—and the sins of all.

Section 3

"*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 (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; 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, 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) in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel*" (vss. 12–16).

The Jews—Judged by the Law

Continuing his rebuke of the judgmental in Rome, Paul appealed to the Law as the standard the Jews will be judged against "*as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law*" (vs. 12). He did not discount the purpose of the Law (knowing that the Law had been abolished in Christ, see Ephesians 2:15 and Colossians 2:14), but consistently used the Law as the standard by which man *may* be judged. For this reason, He wrote, *"Do we make void the law through faith? Certainly Not! On the contrary, we establish the Law"* (Romans 3:31)—even within the Church Age.

Scripture explains that no man or woman is justified by or through the Law. *"…knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified"* (Galatians 2:16). Why? Because no one is capable of keeping the Law—save Jesus Himself. Therefore, *"Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us..."* (Galatians 3:13a). Paul understood that *"the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith"* (Galatians 3:24). Therefore, he used it to teach the Jews (vs. 17) about the holy standards of God, and their (our) need for a savior.

Jews and Gentiles—Judged by the Gospel

The Jews and Gentiles will be judged by the Gospel "*in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to [the] gospel*" (vs. 16b). Although the Gentiles "*show the work of the law written in their hearts"* (vs. 15)—neither the Jew nor the Gentile *will* be judged exclusively by the Law! Inasmuch as it is the high standard by which, and through which, man *may* be judged and condemned—it is the Gospel that now provides the standard through which mankind may pass from death to life. As already mentioned, Jesus said, *"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life"* (John 5:24). Therefore, those who trust Christ for salvation will escape the coming judgment and, therefore, *"the wrath to come"* (1 Thessalonians 1:10). The Jews and Gentiles are given this same blessing!

Although the Law was exclusively given to the Jews (see Romans 3:1–2), they will be judged by the Gospel. Therefore, their judgment of the Gentiles by the standards of the Law was an act of self-condemning ignorance.

May we all be ever thankful for the grace of God! Rest in His sovereign care and the nurturing of His own. Passing judgment against one another especially by privilege is off limits—*"inexcusable."*

Who Was Judging Who?

"Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law" (vss. 17–20).

Those initially addressed were Jews (vs. 17) who were critical of the Gentiles.

Within the introduction I mentioned that somewhere about 49-50 A.D. Caesar Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome (see Acts 18:2b). However, after his death (54 A.D.) they began to return. During the 4-year span between 50 A.D. and 54 A.D., it seems that some Gentile believers had grown boastful against the Jews, and some Jews had become increasingly critical of the Gentiles.

The Jews addressed were self-aggrandizing as *"a light to the blind,"* believing themselves to be *"teachers of babes"* and *"a light to those who are in darkness."*

The Scriptures did declare that through the Messiah, light would come to the Gentiles. Therefore, these believing Jews saw themselves as the justified extensions of Jesus' ministry.

In Isaiah we read, *"Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles… A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench; He will bring forth justice for truth…Thus says God the LORD…I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house"* (Isaiah 42:1–7 abridged); and, *"Indeed [God] says, 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth'"* (Isaiah 49:6).

In Acts, we read, *"James…saying, 'Men and brethren, listen to me: Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: "After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up; So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the LORD who does all these things." Known to God from eternity are all His works. Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God'"* (Acts 15:13–19 abridged, James citing from Amos 9:11–12).

These (believing) Jews, rather than serving the Lord by encouraging the Gentile believers, were criticizing and misjudging them—by the Law. They correctly saw themselves as an extension of Jesus' work to the nations—but not from a righteous disposition. Their assessment of the Gentile believers was wrong! They were arrogant and condescending rather than being the humble servants they were called to become. Judging the Gentiles by the standards of the Law was unacceptable. Yet, the Jews were holding them in contempt for not

keeping it. Moreover, as stated, God knows *"the secrets"* of men. Therefore, the Jews who thought themselves righteous—and thought that "the secrets" of their hearts were hidden from the Lord—exposed themselves to the evaluation Paul laid out before them. (Illustrative to God's knowledge of "the secrets" of man, refer to Ezekiel 8, Luke 12:1–3, and Hebrews 4:12–13.)

The Jewish believers had *"knowledge and truth in the Law,"* but their maturity in the *"truth"* of the Gospel was lacking. They should have known that the Gentiles would be granted access to God (as promised), but their critical disposition demonstrated that they were unwelcoming—not the teachers they should have been. They were not loving their Gentile "neighbors;" they were judging them—and that by segregational bias.

I have seen the same behavior among those I refer to as adolescent Christians—critical of fellow believers. The adolescent believer may attribute a level of maturity to themselves that falls short of true maturity, wherein we serve the less mature rather than criticize them. Judging the growth (or lack thereof) of others is a judgment against the Lord for we are *"His workmanship"* (see Ephesians 2:10). This is not the attributes of maturity in the Lord. May we be ever mindful of our call to serve one another—not criticize, belittle, and/or demean.

Later in this study we will see that the Jewish believers were not the only ones who needed instruction. The Gentile believers also fell short, seeing themselves as superior to the Jews. Supersessionism (also known as Replacement Theology) was an issue in the first century as it is today. Paul made a clear documentation of this error (Romans 9–11).

Section 4

"Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, 'Do not commit adultery,' do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? For 'the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,' as it is written" (vss. 17–24).

No Rest in the Law

The Law could only provide measurement and condemnation. This is why it is referred to as the *"ministry of death"* (2 Corinthians 3:7). Therefore, it is not to be rested upon or boasted in (vss. 17 and 23). The Jews, thinking that they were "guides to the blind" Gentiles (vs. 19), were guilty of breaking the Law and were therefore "dishonoring God" (vs. 23) and, moreover, causing the Gentiles to *"blaspheme God"* (vs. 24) whom these Jews claimed to serve.

As mentioned above, the adolescent Christian might be guilty of a similar error to that identified among the judgmental Jews. Believers thinking themselves to be better and above unbelievers—and judging unbelievers by the standards of the believer—harm their representation of God. This is not to suggest that believers are not to keep the bar high before those in the world, but judgmental criticism of non-believers/unbelievers is not the prerogative of those who believe (see 1 Corinthians 5:9–10).

No Trust in Circumcision

"Circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law?" (vss. 25–27). "

The Jews who were "resting upon" and "boasting in" the Law were themselves in violation of the Law they believed made them righteous. As it were, comparatively, they were in worse condition than the Gentiles who may have been unaware of the Law but nonetheless were observing it (at least in part) as a matter of God-given conscience. In this case we cite stealing, committing adultery, and/or abhorring idols.

Paul was not suggesting that the Gentiles were keeping the whole of the Law; he was simply showing (by contrast) that the Gentiles would have been thought a better testimony of the circumcision of the heart—in spite of their physically uncircumcised condition.

Paul knew that the sign of circumcision was indeed commanded in the Law for the Jews, being a sign of the covenant between God and Israel (see Genesis 17:11, Romans 4:11). However, the circumcision of the heart was the required "sign" signifying trust in God—and in His covenant. The outward sign was simply not enough! For this reason, Paul wrote, "*circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God"* (vs. 29). The outward was certainly a Jewish commandment, but the outward without the inward is no more than the removal of a portion of flesh.

Isaiah prophesied to Israel documenting the word of the Lord, *"Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me"* (Isaiah 29:13 abridged), and Moses commanded*, "Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer"* (Deuteronomy 10:16). Therefore, the Gentiles who were honoring the commands to refrain from adultery, stealing, and idolatry were demonstrating a circumcision of the heart, whereas the Jews were simply going through the outward motions but dishonoring God by their hypocritical choices.

Paul wrote, *"God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation"* (Galatians 6:14–15).

God always desires the circumcision of the heart (see Deuteronomy 10:12–17).

Much can be said about going through religious motions—while failing to genuinely serve God. An outward show of religion and/or religious activity (water baptism, church attendance, tithing, serving, etc.) falls short (as good as these things may be) if it flows from self-confidence and pride rather than from genuine humility and spiritual worship.

The True Jew

Paul wrote, "*For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God"* (vss. 28–29).

This passage (as well as a few others) has led to serious misunderstandings of Scriptural Israelology—namely that anyone (Jew or Gentile) who is "circumcised in heart" becomes and is a Jew—"*the Israel of God"* (Galatians 6:16). This is not what Paul was declaring.

The Israel of God

The Israel of God is the Jewish believer—the one who has trusted Jesus as Messiah. Gentile believers are not Jews, never have been, and never will be!

Paul did tell the Galatians *"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise"* (Galatians 3:26–29).

However, inasmuch as we are recipients of *"the promise"* God made Abraham, and therefore, *"heirs according to the promise,"* we do not become Jews by believing any more than we become "Abraham's (physical) seed." Likewise, we become *"one in Christ"*, but we do not become Christ Himself.

The message to the Galatians did not declare Gentiles as Jews. The message declared that salvation is offered to all—male and female, slave and free, Jew and Gentile. If one were suggesting that Gentiles may become Jews by faith in Christ, they would also suggest that a male may become a female, or a female may become a male. This contextual logic does not work.

Earlier in the same letter Paul wrote, *"just as Abraham 'believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' Therefore, know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, 'In you all the nations shall be blessed.' So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham* (Galatians 3:6–9). *"All the nations"*—Jew and Gentile!