

Study 3: Romans Chapter 2

Introduction

In the second chapter of the letter, Paul contrasts the Jews and the Gentiles. He draws some conclusions on the way in which righteousness is established (actually denied, since Jesus was the only righteous one) by the Gentiles, and contrasts that with the Jews who said that they kept the Law of Moses (but were actually condemned by not keeping it!).

Body of the Study

Who is the next group that Paul describes?

Why will they be condemned?

What will God do about it?

What conclusion does Paul make in vs 12?

How do the Gentiles perform by nature the things of the Law?

Who are the third group?

What good is it to be a Jew?

Homework and preparation for next week:

- *Can you see any parallels between the groups that Paul describes in Romans and those in the world today? Who are the three types of people?*
- *What is the essence of the argument that Paul has made so far?*
- Read the notes as a review of the study.
- Read chapter 3 in preparation for the next study.

Notes for study 3: Chapter 2

Introduction

In the second chapter of the letter, Paul contrasts the Jews and the Gentiles. He draws some conclusions on the way in which righteousness is established (actually denied, since Jesus was the only righteous one) by the Gentiles, and contrasts that with the Jews who said that they kept the Law of Moses (but were actually condemned by not keeping it!).

Body of the Study

Who is the next group that Paul describes?

The next group that are those who *know* right and wrong. He describes them as *judging* others. They make judgements and accusations against others for the very things that they are doing themselves.

Whilst they are somewhat contrasted with the first group – they also have some similarities. Paul established a principle in 1:20&21 – that knowledge plus opportunity gives an obligation. Those in the first group had a knowledge of the creator and the opportunity to seek Him out – which provided an obligation to do so, and being rightly condemned because they didn't follow through with the obligation. Likewise those in the second group also have an obligation. They have a knowledge of right and wrong, and the opportunity to do right, but end up doing wrong. Like the first group they are rightly condemned for not following through with their obligation.

They are somewhat (but not totally) removed from the immorality of those in the first chapter. The former could be described as amoral, whilst the second are more moralistic Gentiles. Despite having some morals that were lacking in the first group, they will not escape the righteous judgement of God (2:3).

Why will they be condemned?

These people were despising the gifts of God. They knew better, but still would not repent. They knew God's goodness, His patience, and His tolerance, but they still would not repent and come to Him in obedience. Paul says that they were "...*despising God's riches...*" (2:4), and that "...*their hearts were hardened and impenitent...*" (2:5).

The results of their actions was to store up "...*wrath against the day of wrath...*" (2:5). They ought to have been "...*laying up for themselves treasure in heaven...*" (Lk 12:16-40), but their minds were not tuned towards God. They were mindful of their own desires rather than the needs of others. Unlike the former group, these were *good people*. They were not *morally desolate* and involved in all sorts of sinful practices.

But despite all of that, they had "...*hard and impenitent hearts...*" (2:5). The picture is like our society today. There are those like the first group who are involved in all sorts of immorality – drunkenness, sexual immorality, homosexuality, murderers etc etc. And then there are some like the second group. The decent people of our society who are morally upstanding and the pillars of our communities. But when we talk to them about God, they are just not interested. They don't want to know. Their hearts are hard. They don't want to acknowledge their sins. They won't repent.

God is patient, and wants all men to come to repentance. Many have mis-construed this to imply that God is slow concerning His promise – or even that there is no God at all. This is especially so in our society where men have been brainwashed by "science" to conclude that everything started with a *big-bang*, and that there is no creator God.

What will God do about it?

God's righteous judgement will be brought down. God will not be fooled. He will bring true and righteous judgement. His judgement will be just. Everyone will receive judgement according to their deeds – the things that we have done. There will be no escape from God's judgement.

Being judged according to our deeds *does not mean* that we will earn our salvation. Rather it means how we respond to God – whether we repent of our sins, and whether we accept Jesus by applying the kind of faith that Abraham showed and *doing* the things that God said we should do (just as Abraham obeyed God, and his obedience was the true test of his faith).

The consequences are:

- Eternal life – to those who patiently continue to do good, and seek after God. The state of glory, honour and immortality.
- Indignation and Wrath – to those who are self-seeking, and who do not obey the truth.

Paul then restates this again (he is emphasising the point). Tribulation and anguish will come on them. It will not just be on some people. It will be on all those who deserve it (2:9). God is not a respecter of persons – he is impartial (2:11). It doesn't matter if we are Jews or Greeks – in fact the Jews should know better, as they have had a long-time relationship with God. On the other hand, those who work good (those who obey God through a proper response to faith) will receive glory and honour and peace – again whether they are Jews or Greeks doesn't matter.

What conclusion does Paul make in vs 12?

If we are outside of the Law, we still sin. This is because we are reprobates and have totally ignored the obligation that was brought about by our knowledge of God through creation, and we have abandoned any thought of God so that we might practice immorality (Chapter 1)

Even if we are not involved in immorality (but we are good people), we still find that we have not done the things that our consciences dictate that we should. We condemn others, yet do the very same things ourselves (Chapter 2:1-11).

Paul may have the Jews in mind in the second group, since he adds about those who “...are under the Law, will be judged by the Law...” (2:12). He further expands this thought in vs 13, that it is not good enough to be hearers of the Law, but we need to be doers of the Law (c/f Js 1:22-24), we need to put into *practice* the things that we learn. Importantly, we need to obey God, just like Abraham did when God told him to sacrifice the son of promise, he “...rose up early in the morning and went, accounting that God was able to raise him up again...” (Gen 22:3, Heb 11:17-19). Abraham did not procrastinate. He was called by God, and then immediately obeyed by doing what God said to do.

It doesn't really matter whether we are under the Law or not (ie Jews or Gentiles), we are all condemned, because we have all sinned.

How do the Gentiles perform by nature the things of the Law?

In 2:14, Paul says

¹⁴ (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, (NIV)

The Gentiles did not have the Law in the codified form that the Jews had. But they still had *a sense of Law – a sense of right and wrong*. They have moral obligations placed on them as a result, and they have what has been called a “universal moral law”. When the Gentiles do the things that such a moral law would require, it shows them up against the Jews who have the codified Law but do not do what it says.

Paul is not saying that these people are morally right, and therefore uncondemned before God – on the contrary, they still didn't do what they ought to have done. But what he is saying is that whilst the Jews might consider the Gentiles reprobates, they (at least some of them) are in fact “more righteous” than the Jews. The point that Paul is making is that they had enough morals to know that what they were doing was wrong – and God is right to condemn them, just as he is right to condemn the Jews for not keeping the codified Law.

Note the parenthesis of 2:13-15. Without the parenthesis, the text would read:

“...and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law... ()...in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ...” (NKJV)

It is quite clear that Paul is talking about the final judgement here and not some other form of judgement (such as the Gentiles being compared to the Jews).

Who are the third group?

The first group was the amoral Gentiles, who have abandoned any notion of God. The second is the moralistic Gentile, who do not live under codified law, but are still condemned by their actions. The third group are the Jews who did live under the codified Law. These people *“...rest on the Law, and make their boast in God, and know His will...being instructed out of the Law,...”* (2:17-18)

Paul describes them as self-righteous. Even the most humble of them is still guilty of not (fully) keeping the Law which they profess. They *“...approve the things that are excellent...are confident that they are guides to the blind...a light to those who are in darkness,...an instructor of the foolish...a teacher of babes...”* (2:18-19).

But their perception is self directed and self deceiving. They *“...have the form of knowledge and truth in the Law...”* (2:19). Having the form is one thing, but having the truth is another. They are just like the first group *“...professing themselves to be wise, they became fools...”* (1:22). Paul says that they *“...teach others, but do not learn themselves...”* (my paraphrase of 2:21), *“...they say do not commit adultery...but then do it themselves...”* *“...they find idols abhorrent, but rob temples...”* *“...they make their boast in law, but dishonour God by breaking it...”* (2:21-23)

Paul has made a strong case here to show that the Jews (even the best of them) are still condemned before God.

The indictment is summarized by the general charge of breaking the very law the Jew boasts of (v. 23). In fact, the failure is so notorious that even non-Jews notice the discrepancy. At this point Paul introduces a quotation from Isa 52:5. God has been obliged to chasten his disobedient people by permitting them to go into captivity, where their captors make sport of their God who was apparently unable to prevent their deportation (cf. Eze 36:20-21). But there also the fault lay not with God but with his people who had refused to take his law seriously. (NIVBC)

What good is it to be a Jew?

This is a perfectly natural question, and Paul will answer it in much greater detail in the next chapter. But for now, he says that *“...being a Jew is profitable if you keep the Law...”* (2:25). That of course, is true, but the only catch is that no-one (apart from Jesus) ever kept the Law perfectly (or even any system of law for that matter, let alone Moses' Law).

But the consequence is that if we don't keep it perfectly, then the very law that we are advocating condemns us! We might as well live outside of law (and the Law) as the Gentiles do. *“..Even the Gentiles themselves “show up” the Jews who are advocating righteousness to come by keeping the Law...”* (my paraphrase of 2:27).

The real point is that the true Jew is not the one who puts on the outward appearance, and parades around showing to others that he is keeping the Law, and demanding that others keep it too. The true Jew is the person who keeps the law of God inwardly. His heart is really attuned to God. (He will have the kind of faith that Abraham showed, and it is observed in his obedience to God). He is a spiritual person, who is guided by the meaning of the Law, and not just literally keeping it (this does not mean that we should not keep it literally, but rather that we should do it because we understand what it is saying and why it is important, rather than “just because it says to do it”).

The person who has his heart tuned to God will have the praise of God, rather than the praise of men.