

## *Bible Study Romans 2*

*“2 <sup>1</sup>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.”*

Here Paul is criticizing the classic sin of hypocrisy. Christ often condemned the Pharisees for it.

*“Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers” (Matthew 23:3-4).*

*“But the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath; and he said to the crowd, “There are six days on which men ought to work; therefore come and be healed on them, and not on the Sabbath day.” Lord then answered him and said, “Hypocrite! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or donkey from the stall, and lead it away to water it?” (Luke 13:14-15).*

This has always been a problem in the church. One of the most common reasons people reject Christianity is they say churches “are full of hypocrites.” Our first is to always practice what we profess, or at least not profess what we are not doing. The key is humility; we are not authorized to judge others. Christ said, *“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? (Matthew 7:1-2)*

Have you ever witnessed hypocrisy in the church?

The penalties for hypocrisy can be severe:

*“2 But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. <sup>3</sup> 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?”*

The next few verses give us another hint how not to be a hypocrite – If we tend to find fault in others, compare others’ faults to our own faults, which are often worse:

*“4 Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?”*

This principle is mentioned in the Lord’s Prayer: *“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass.”* We must forgive instead of judging. Christ put it bluntly, *“So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses” (Matthew 18:35)*

This teaching was important to Christians in Rome. The Empire's culture valued revenge and retaliation. Forbearance and forgiveness were considered cowardly and weak. Modern America is much the same.

<https://youtu.be/cjOPLTTjnw?si=uRA0oaoAQKwchZNR>

*<sup>5</sup> 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, <sup>6</sup> who “will render to each one according to his deeds”:*

Most of our Protestant friends do not believe that we will be judged by our deeds on Judgement Day. They believe we will be judged only by our faith, our absence of it. Orthodoxy believes that we will be judged, at least in part, on our works.

*“You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only” (James 2:24).*

*“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10).*

Works are also mentioned in the next verses:

*<sup>7</sup> eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; <sup>8</sup> but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, <sup>9</sup> tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil...*

The role of faith and works in our salvation is especially important to understanding the message of the book of Romans. This book rightly teaches the importance of faith, but it has often been construed to mean that works are not important to salvation. In the above verses the correct balance of both faith and works is recognized.

*“...of the Jew first and also of the Greek;”*

We saw that Paul used the formula “to the Jew and to the Greek” before in 1:16. He uses it twice here in chapter 2. It indicates that the Christian community at Rome consisted of both Jew and Gentiles (which he calls “Greeks,” but is referring to all the non-Jewish nationalities). Both groups needed proper instruction on their roles and relationships in this new, multi-ethnic Church. Early in his earthly ministry Christ stated, *“I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24)*. Similarly, he instructed his disciples, *“Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. <sup>6</sup> But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand’ (Matthew 10:5-7).*

Later Christ included the Gentiles in his outreach: *“And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd” (John 10:16-17).*

*“<sup>10</sup> but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. <sup>11</sup> For there is no partiality with God.”*

Once Christ united Jews and Gentiles in His one Church, the two groups were to be treated equally. Paul reiterated this founding principle elsewhere: *“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” (3:28).* This founding principle was sometimes put to the test in the early Church, as some Jewish Christians attempted to force Gentile Christians to follow Jewish dietary laws and circumcision. Paul emphatically opposed the Judaification of Christianity. The First Council of Jerusalem agreed. It decreed, *“For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well” (Acts 15:28-29).*

For the Jewish converts to Christianity, obedience to the Law of Moses was an ingrained habit. Gentile converts knew little or nothing about the Torah. Paul addresses the Gentile believers first:

*“<sup>12</sup> For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law...”*

Before Christ came, Gentiles unknowing sinned under a law that they did not know.

To the Jewish converts Paul states:

*“.... as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law”*

Jews had the law, but often did not follow it. Paul is saying that both Jews and Gentiles were largely in the same boat. One group should not feel superior to the other.

*“<sup>13</sup> (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified;”*

Jews sought salvation by obeying the law, but many only listened to it while not practicing it. This is much like the “hypocrites” described earlier in this chapter.

*“<sup>14</sup> 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, <sup>15</sup> 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)”*

Paul is saying that in Old Testament times, many Gentiles found salvation, even without the direct revelation that Jews had in the law. This would have been comforting to the new

Gentile Christians and humbling to the new Jewish Christians. The Jews recognized this phenomenon, and called the righteous gentiles “God fearers.” This phenomenon is probably true today. Orthodoxy teaches us never to disparage the possibility of those outside the official Church to find favor with God in ways that we don’t always see.

Augustine understood this, and said, “there are wolves that are within, and there are sheep without.” Bishop Kallistos Ware wrote:

“Many people may be members of the Church who are not visibly so; invisible bonds may exist despite an outward separation. The Spirit of God blows where it Chooses and, a Irenaeus said, where the Spirit is, there is the Church. We know where the Church is but we cannot be sure where it is not. This means, as Khomakov insists, that we must refrain from passing judgement on non-Orthodox Christians: “Inasmuch as the earthly and visible Church is not the fullness and completeness of the whole Church which the Lord appointed to appear at the final judgement of all creation, she acts and knows only within her own limits... She does not judge the rest of humankind, and only looks upon those as excluded, that is to say, not belonging to her, who exclude themselves. The rest of humankind, whether alien from the Church, or united to her by ties which God has not willed to reveal to her, she leaves to the judgement of the great day.”

The importance of leaving the judgement to God is expressed here: “<sup>16</sup> *in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.*”

Once again, Paul decries any smugness and self-righteousness among his fellow Jews, who claim to follow the law, but do not:

*<sup>17</sup>Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, <sup>18</sup>and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, <sup>19</sup>and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, <sup>20</sup>an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. <sup>21</sup>You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? <sup>22</sup>You who say, “Do not commit adultery,” do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? <sup>23</sup>You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law?*

Outsiders who witnessed such hypocrisy among some Jews react the same way modern non-Christians react when they see similar behavior among Christians. “<sup>24</sup> *For “the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,” as it is written.*”

The hallmark of a male Jew was his circumcision. For most Jewish males, the physical result of his circumcision was a source of great pride. Paul warns against such a conclusion:

*“<sup>25</sup> For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.”*

Proud Jewish males probably assumed that their circumcision as proof of their closeness to God was irreversible. Paul informed them that spiritually, their circumcision was reversible. He then applies the corollary to the faithful Gentiles.

*“<sup>26</sup> Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision?”*

Once again, Paul teaches the Jewish Christians not confuse their circumcisions with actual living righteous. He also teaches the Gentiles that their absence of circumcision means that they are far from God. The two groups are in the same boat before God. It is their heart and actions that matter, not foreskins.

*“<sup>28</sup> For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; <sup>29</sup> 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.*

Paul discusses circumcision at length in the book of Galatians. He concludes in 6:15, “*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.*”