

ROMANS

Session_4

2:1-24

From The Immoral Pagan To The Religious

To this point, Paul has laid out the sinful degradation of a society that has rejected God altogether. It begins with denying His existence and right to be worshiped through obedience and a thankful heart. As the natural rebellion that exists in fallen humanity is “released” gradually from God’s common, restraining grace, the openly tolerated, participated in and celebrated gross immorality becomes distorted to the point of unnatural conduct. In this downward progression, the individual, the family and all of society begins to crumble into chaos to the point where the evil intent of the human heart is continual.

In chapter two Paul shifts the focus to those who are religious; from non - Jewish forms of organized morality to the Jew who has been given the law of God. From verse 1 to 6 Paul is referencing those who would presume that they are acceptable because they believe that they keep the standard they live by.

Gods Judgment On The Self - Righteous

2:1-3) "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. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. 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?"

No excuse ... every one of you who judges - Paul laid out in his discussion so far that pagan, God - rejecting society is without excuse and that their denial of God is suppressing the truth in unrighteousness, and not because of any legitimate claim to innocent ignorance. Here Paul is shining the light on those who have a standard, practice it with the belief that they keep it and then judge others based on that self - righteousness.

Notice how Paul says this person is bringing upon themselves condemnation based on the fact that they “judge”. While they judge they ***practice the same things***. Paul is talking about hypocrisy here. In His sermon on the mount, Jesus amplified sin through pointing out that its not just external things but internal things that God looks at:

" "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire." [Mat 5:21-22 ESV]

" "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart." [Mat 5: 27-28 ESV]

ROMANS

Session_4

2:1-24

Jesus contended with the pious religious leaders of His day that while they claimed to represent God, they were actually far from it because they missed the heart of the law:

"And the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also? But give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you. "But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it." " [Luk 11:39-44 ESV]

Jesus also declared that "...unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mat 5:20). Jesus is saying here that those who are under the illusion that they are able to fully satisfy the righteous requirements of God's standards fail to realize that God looks at the heart and sees all that humanity on the outside cannot see. God also sees all that is done in secret.

Until one is converted by the work of the Holy Spirit, all religion is practiced in the self delusion of believing that they are "good" yet ignore what is practiced in their heart. No unredeemed person who believes themselves to be acceptable in God's eye by their own efforts will be able to withstand **the judgment of God**. The warning here from Paul is that of God's final judgment on man (Rev 20:11-15) when the "books are opened to reveal every sin of the unrepentant; including word, deed and thought. Jesus warned His disciples:

...., "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops." [Luk 12:1-3 ESV]

2:4-5) "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? 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."

Paul again refers to the common grace of God that is shed on all humanity in that He withholds His immediate, just wrath against every single sinful act of mankind, from the individual to the whole. As Peter says "God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. (2Pe 3:9)" The lack of God's immediate judgment does not mean that He will not finally pour out His wrath.

"The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1Cor. 2:14). So even though exposed to religion, from pagan religion to the God-given Jewish religion, the unrepentant are storing up wrath, why? Paul says: **because of your hard and impenitent heart**. This is an extremely important detail that Paul points out here. No one that will experience the ultimate wrath of God will be "innocent" rather they are of hardened heart. This is fallen humanity left

ROMANS

Session_4

2:1-24

to their own natural will; rebellion against the truth. All who die without the Lord face immediate punishment, yet they await the final day of judgment that is to come:

"Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." [Rev 20:11-15 ESV]

Gods Judges On The Basis Of Deeds

2:6-7) "He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life;"

Here the distinguishing characteristics of God's people are described. **Well - doing** or "good" must be defined in terms of what God calls good, not by human definition. When called "good teacher" by the rich young ruler (Lk 18:18-19), Jesus responded "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone." While Jesus was not denying that He was good, it was not based on the fact that He was a mere teacher of good, rather that He as God is the source of good and God's standard of good is not derived from the minds of fallen humanity.

Until a person has been given the gift of new life in Christ, he has no "good" works. The one who builds on anything other than Christ is like the one who builds on shifting sands. Jesus is the foundation of what is to be considered good by God:

"For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw-- each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire." [1Co 3:11-15 ESV]

Those who are in Christ are part of what Revelation 20:5 and 6 identifies as the first resurrection and while believers will not face the white throne judgment for God's appointed wrath, we will never the less have our works "tested" at the judgment seat of Christ (2Cor 5:10). The admonishment for God's people is to not grow weary in well - doing (Gal 6:9; 2Thes 3:13; Heb 12:3; Rev 2:3). God's people weren't saved simply to escape His wrath but to perform "good works":

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." [Eph 2:10 ESV]

ROMANS

Session_4

2:1-24

The motivation for this well - doing is seeking for **glory and honor**. Ultimately it is God's glory and honor that the believer seeks:

"In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." [Mat 5:16 ESV]

"So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." [1Co 10:31 ESV]

Additionally there is a glory that awaits the believer as well:

"For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." [Col 3:3-4 ESV]

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." [Rom 8:18-23 ESV]

"But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself." [Phl 3:20-21 ESV]

There is an eternal body that will be given to every human being. For the believer this is glory, but for the unbelieving this is eternal devastation; the "second death" (Rev 20:6, 14,15).

2:8-9) "but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek,"

Obeying the truth is not a reference to earning salvation rather it is submitting to the truth that all have sinned and need God's righteousness provided through His Son. **Self - seeking** humanity cannot overcome the pride of sin rather they obey unrighteousness. While it may seem that many who defy God's righteousness do well in this life, the future is certain for the unrepentant; eternal **tribulation and distress**.

Jew first and also the Greek - This is the second time that Paul makes this distinction in this letter and will continue to elaborate on this. In this case, the judgment of God will be more severe on those who are the "natural branches" of His promises. The Jews have had the privilege of receiving God's special revelation through the

ROMANS

Session_4

2:1-24

Law and the prophets and have the promises of God through which the Savior came. The same is true for the blessing even though the promises aren't limited to the Jews:

2:10-11) "but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality."

The new Jerusalem (Rev 21) will have gates honoring the 12 tribes of Israel and 12 foundation stones will honor the twelve apostles. Romans, Revelation and the prophets make a future for Israel clear, but it will be for believing Israel. Paul will continually build on this theme that Israel has certain blessing and a future but that it will not be simply because they are Jewish by blood that they will have this blessing, rather it will be based on their belief. Likewise believing unnatural branches (Gentiles) can be "grafted in" - ***God shows no partiality***, both groups are judged or blessed by the same standard; obedience / disobedience to the truth.

A Law Unto Themselves

2:12-13) "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. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified."

In this summary statement sinners perish. For those who have not had exposure to God's written law, the degree of their perishing will not be based on the written law, rather on the generally revealed law that is "plain to them" (1:18-23). For those who have been exposed to God's revealed law in scripture, the standard of judgment will be higher. In order to be ***justified*** one must be a doer of the law. The term justified is a declaration of righteousness. God declares righteous those who do the law. Yet previously Paul said "*the just shall live by faith*" (1:17). In light of the fact that Paul will go on to declare in chapter three that no one seeks after God and all have fallen short of Gods glory, how can we reconcile these two? Paul will explain in further chapters.

2:14-16) "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. 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 on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus."

The first time God came to visit Adam and Eve after their plunge into sin, they hid themselves and when God asked where they were, Adam responded with "*I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid myself.*" God replied "*who told you that you were naked?*" The only law that God had given to that point was that Adam was to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In this exchange we see that Adam felt shame over being naked, why? Was there a written law concerning nakedness?

In this very early scene we are shown the principle of ***a law unto themselves, ...that the work of the law is written on their hearts***... Their conscience that once was innocent; free from any knowledge of good or evil, was now

ROMANS

Session_4

2:1-24

“burdened” with this knowledge. So from the very fall of Adam and Eve humanity has the knowledge of good and evil, which is both a blessing and a curse. A blessing because the conscience serves as a guide, but a curse in that the sinful nature wars against it and proves our guilt before God. Paul calls this the **work of the law** which is written on the heart. What is the work of the law?

"But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor [to lead us] to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith." [Gal 3:22-24 NASB95]

Jews As Guilty As Gentiles

2:17-20) "But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law; and if you are sure 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 children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth--"

Paul starts this list of identifying features of the confident Jew by describing their self righteous. They **rely on the law**. The Psalmist proclaims “Let your mercy come to me, that I may live; for your law is my delight” (Ps 119:77). The law is good and if these things that Paul lists of the self righteous were based on the conviction of a genuine repentant heart, they would be good things. Yet Paul goes on to ask a series of rhetorical questions that reveal the obvious lack of self awareness that is always a characteristic of the self righteous.

2:21-22) "you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? "

This list shows the disconnect between what they knew and who they actually are. *"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb 4:12 ESV)*. The unrepentant only know the law but are not transformed by it. These delighted in the law because they believed they were perfect in keeping it and used it as a weapon of power and prestige against those around them. This is the way of the pharisee. Paul goes on to point out their false confidence:

2:23-24) "You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you. " "

"so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."" [1Co 1:31 ESV]

Believer are you boasting in the Lord alone; in Christ and Him crucified? We are also admonished to not allow our conduct to bring dishonor to the name of God; ie. lack of mercy, self righteous arrogance.