

## Lesson 3

# Chapter Two

### God's Judgment of the Hypocrite (2:1-11)

Chapter one outlined the sinfulness of the Gentile world. This condition would have been abhorrent to the Jewish Christians in the congregation and readily apparent to them living in the city of Rome. What might have been less apparent was the sinfulness of their own people, the Jews. The Apostle addresses this problem, declaring **you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge** (2:1a). Paul does not specifically offer the Romans a rebuke so much as pointing out the common tendency to judge others while ignoring one's own sin. Paul says to one who would do this, **you condemn yourself** because of the fact that **you who judge practice the same things** (2:1b). Jesus taught that all constructive judgments of another person can only occur when we are willing to first correct ourselves (Matt. 7:1-5).

God is not blind to man's hypocrisy. God's judgments are **according to truth** (2:2). He sees and will call the hypocrite to account. Far too often the hypocrite imagines that he **will escape the judgment of God** (2:3b). The hypocrite fails to realize that God's delay in executing judgment upon sin is not tolerance of sin but the opportunity for repentance.

The hypocrite despises **the riches of His goodness, forbearance and longsuffering** (2:4a). Paul teaches the hypocrite to realize **the goodness of God leads you to repentance** (2:4b).

While some may realize this, they still delay their repentance. Paul explains the cause of this rebellion just as he explained the rebellion of the pagan world in the previous chapter. It comes from



Coin with the image of Caesar Augustus, the first emperor of Rome. Courtesy of FreeStockPhotos.com.

**hardness** and from an **impenitent heart** (2:5a). The Greek word for "impenitent" is *ametanoēton*, meaning literally an "unchanging-mind." The hardened hypocrite has a heart that is unwilling to change. When man does this he treasures up **wrath in the day of wrath** (2:5b). God's

coming wrath is revealed in the gospel (Rom. 1:18) but it awaits "the day of wrath" (i.e., Judgment Day). This day will see **the revelation of the righteous judgment of God** (2:5c). On the day of wrath no matter how successfully the hypocrite has concealed his or her sin, on that day God **will render to each one according to his deeds** (2:6). Paul uses this line found in both Psalm 62:12 and Proverbs 24:12 to illustrate the inescapable nature of God's judgment.

It is significant to note that in an epistle that focuses on the saving power of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the apostle asserts in the opening pages of the epistle that God will grant **eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality** (2:7). It is a supreme distortion of the gospel to suggest that salvation by grace takes away from man the obligation to "do good." **Glory, honor, and peace** come only to those who **work what is good** (2:10). This is not to be confused with "earning" salvation. No good deed any human can do can take away even a single sin. At the same time, the gospel of grace demands that those who are obedient to it, do what is right. Paul told Titus in Jesus' sacrifice God purified "for Himself his own special people zealous for good works" (Titus 2:14).

Rejection of the gospel reflects a character that is **self seeking** (2:8a). Those who will not **obey the truth** choose to **obey unrighteousness** (2:8b). Their reward for this rebellion is **indignation and wrath** (2:8c). God shows no party loyalty or favoritism. The Jew, with whom God established His covenant and the Greek who knew nothing of God's laws are equally obligated to obey God. **For there is no partial-**

**ity with God** (2:11). Thayer tells us that the Greek word *prosōpolēpsia*, translated “partiality” (KJV— “respect of persons”) refers to one who errs by allowing external appearance, wealth, power, or high birth to sway or influence judgment. God is the One who made us. God “knows our frame, He remembers that we are dust” (Psa. 103:14). All those kinds of things that color man’s judgment mean nothing to God.

### The Jews Are Also Under Sin (2:12-24)

The focus of chapter two is on hypocrisy. Paul calls the Roman brethren to recognize that the sinner will be judged whether he is a Jew or a Gentile. Both those who have **sinned without law** and those who **have sinned in the law** will be judged and perish (2:12). Paul uses “law” here in reference to the Mosaic Law. No one is “without law toward God” (1 Cor. 9:21), or else he could not be held accountable for sin—“where there is no law there is no transgression” (Rom. 4:15). Paul illustrates that simply being Jews, and **hearers of the law** (2:13a) is not what pleases God. The Law of Moses was to be read before the congregation of Israel every seven years (Deut. 31:9-13). Moses was read in the synagogues every Sabbath (Acts 15:21). This was fitting, but God wants **doers of the Law**

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(2:13b, cf. Jas. 1:22-25). While chapter one had illustrated the sinful tendency of the Gentile world, the moral character of some Gentiles shamed the hypocritical Jews, when they **who do not have the law, by**

**nature do the things contained in the law** (2:14). Paul calls the Jewish Christians in Rome to see that God wants obedience. In Christ all pride of race, ethnicity, and background becomes worthless. One day **God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ** (2:16). One day the true character of the hypocrite will be exposed.

The Jew had good reason to feel pride. Later in the epistle Paul points out that it was to the Jews that God had given “the adoption, the glory, the giving of the Law, the service of God and the promises” (9:4). Yet, these very blessings, in some cases became a cause of overconfidence. The Jew might very well **rest in the law** and make his **boast in God** (2:17) assured that he knew **His will** and approved **things that are excellent** (2:18) feeling confident to act as **guide to the blind** and as **light to those in darkness** (2:19). Yet, as can often happen, the one who would **teach another** (2:21) failed to teach himself.

The teacher can be a hypocrite. He may preach against stealing and adultery and then do what he condemns (2:21-22). Paul asks **you who abhor idols, do you rob temples** (2:22)? It seems that some who rightly looked down on the idolatry of the pagans, allowed themselves to feel justified in stealing either the offerings, orna-

mentation, or even the idols of the temples (cf. Acts 19:24). Paul tells those who would do so that they were **dishonoring God through breaking the law** (2:23), and as a result **the name of God** was being **blasphemed among the Gentiles** (2:24).

### Circumcision Under Christ (2:25-29)

The covenant of circumcision had been an important indicator of who was and was not faithful to God from the time of Abraham



The Pantheon was a temple dedicated to “all the gods.” Paul rebuked the hypocrite who “robbed temples.” Courtesy of FreeStockPhotos.com.

(Gen. 17:9-14). Even Moses, when he failed to circumcise his own son, found that God was ready to kill him for his neglect, even after sending him to deliver Israel from Egypt (Exod. 4:24-26). Before the conquest of Canaan could begin the second generation of those who had come out of Egypt had to be circumcised (Josh. 5:2-8). In a pagan world that was given over to sexual immorality, the Jewish male bore a sign in his very flesh that he belonged to God. This was abhorrent to the pagan mind. In the period between the Testaments, the Greek rulers of Palestine viewed this practice as mutilation of the body, and executed those who circumcised their children (1 Macc. 1:60-61).

After the gospel was established, circumcision was considered so much a part of service to God that Jewish Christians argued that it was necessary for Gentile converts to be circumcised (see Acts 15:1-29). If we are correct in our dating of Paul’s epistle to the Romans, by the time Paul writes to them, the Holy Spirit had already revealed that circumcision was not to be bound upon Gentiles (Acts 15:23-25). In his letter to the churches of Galatia Paul declared “in Christ neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything but faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6).

It may have been that some in Rome had been among those who contended that Gentiles should be circumcised, and for this reason Paul chose to address this practice. Under what circumstances was circumcision profitable? Only **if you keep the law** (2:25a). The hypocrite, who was a **breaker of the law** (2:25b), had become as if he was uncircumcised. God was not pleased with a person just because his flesh had been cut, if he disobeyed His word. Paul showed in verses twelve through sixteen that doing the law,

not just hearing the law, was what mattered. Now he makes the same point about circumcision. When **an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirement of the law** (2:26) his behavior serves to judge the one **with the written code and circumcision** showing him to be a **transgressor of the law** (2:27). Paul then makes a revolutionary assertion, declaring **he is not a Jew who is one outwardly** (2:28), instead **he is a Jew who is one inwardly and circumcision is that of the heart** (2:29).

In modern times we use the term “Jew” to refer to someone’s ethnicity, or his adherence to modern Judaism. The term itself developed after Israel was divided into two kingdoms with Israel to the north and Judah to the south. The northern kingdom of Israel was unfaithful to God. Judah wavered between faithfulness and unfaithfulness, finally being exiled when Babylon conquered Jerusalem. The Israelites

from Judah who were faithful during the exile, upon their return were considered the “Jews”—a patronym derived from the name “Judah.” A Jew was considered one faithful to Israel’s covenant with God. The Law of Moses itself had taught that

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serving God involved more than just the circumcision of the flesh. The Holy Spirit said through Moses, “the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live” (Deut. 30:6). Paul teaches the Romans that now being a Jew itself is defined by service in the heart, not just the flesh. Later in the epistle Paul declares the nature of the spiritual Israel, declaring “they are not all Israel who are of Israel” (Rom. 9:6).

## Questions

1. When someone practices what he condemns in others, what does this do (2:1)? \_\_\_\_\_
  2. Explain the phrase, “the goodness of God leads you to repentance” (2:4). \_\_\_\_\_
  3. What does the hard impenitent heart treasure up (2:5)? \_\_\_\_\_
  4. How does Paul teach that one seeks “glory, honor and immortality” (2:7)? \_\_\_\_\_
- What will come to those who do so? \_\_\_\_\_

5. List two statements in this text which show that under Christ, man must do what is right.
- “Patient \_\_\_\_\_” (2:7); and
  - “Everyone who \_\_\_\_\_” (2:10).
6. If someone does not obey the truth, what does he obey (2:8)? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. List four things that will come to the disobedient (2:8b-9a).
- \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
8. Explain the phrase “the Jew first and also to the Greek” (2:9-10). \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Is this partiality on God’s part? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. Does the phrase “sinned without law” mean that some people were not under law (2:12)?  
\_\_\_\_\_ Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. What will God judge, by Jesus Christ on the Day of Judgment (2:16)? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. Explain the phrase “rob temples” (2:22). \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. What had caused God’s name to be blasphemed (2:21-24)? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
13. Under what condition does Paul teach that circumcision would be profitable (2:25)? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
14. When did the covenant of circumcision begin (Gen. 17:9-14)? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
15. Were Gentiles required to be circumcised under Christ (Acts 15:1-29)? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
16. Explain the origin of the term “Jew.” \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
17. Under Christ what now determines if one is a Jew (2:28-29)? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_