

# Studies in Romans-02

by William MacDonald

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*William MacDonald explores the themes of judgment and salvation in Romans, emphasizing that both the heathen and moralists are lost without Christ.*

**Duration:** 36:44

**Scripture:** Romans 2:8-25, Revelation 20:11-12

**Topics:** "Studies"

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## Description

In this sermon, the apostle Paul teaches about the judgment of God. He emphasizes that God's judgment is based on truth and not on incomplete or circumstantial evidence. Those who condemn others for their sins will also face judgment unless they repent and seek forgiveness. The judgment of God is not executed immediately because it involves the conscience and allows for repentance. Paul also highlights that God's judgment is graduated according to the accumulation of guilt, and it will be seen as absolutely righteous on the day of judgment. Additionally, Paul discusses how the judgment of God is according to a person's works, which reveal their true nature and faith. The sermon also addresses objections about God's promises to Israel and emphasizes the total depravity of man. Overall, the sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing God's righteousness and the need for repentance and faith in the face of God's judgment.

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## Transcript

Verse 32 of chapter 1. Those who abuse sex, verse 24, who pervert sex, verses 26 and 27, and who practice the other sins listed, verses 29 to 31, have an innate knowledge not only that these things are wrong, but that they are worthy of death. They know that this is God's verdict, however much they might seek to rationalize or legalize them. But this does not deter them from indulging in all these forms of ungodliness.

Indeed, they unite with others to promote them and feel a sense of camaraderie with their partners in sin. This then is God's answer to the question, are the heathen lost who have never heard? The condemnation of the heathen is that they did not live up to the light which God gave them in creation. Instead, they became idolaters, and as a result were abandoned to lives of depravity and vileness.

But suppose an individual heathen does live up to the light God gives him. Suppose he does burn his idols and seeks after the true God. What then? There are two schools of thought among evangelical believers on this subject.

Some believe that if a pagan lives up to the light of God in creation, God will send him the gospel light. Cornelius is cited as an example. He was seeking after God.

His prayers and alms came up as a memorial before God. Then God sent Peter to tell him how to be saved. Acts 11 verse 14.

Others believe that if a man trusts the one true and living God as he is revealed in creation, then dies before he hears the gospel, God will save him on the basis of the work of Christ. Even though the man himself knew nothing about the work of Christ, God reckons the value of that work to his account when he trusts God on the basis of whatever light he has received. Those who hold this view point out that this is how God saved people before Calvary, and how he still saves morons, imbeciles, and also children who die before they reach the age of accountability.

Either view is tenable without doing violence to the scriptures. And now we come to chapter two. Paul has shown that the pagans are lost and that they need the gospel.

Now he turns to a second class answering the question, are the self-righteous moralists, whether Jews or Gentiles, also lost? Yes, they are lost too. Verse one. This second class consists of those who look down their nose at the heathen, considering themselves more civilized, educated, and refined.

They condemn the pagans for their gross behavior, yet they are equally guilty themselves, though perhaps in a more sophisticated way. Fallen man can see faults in others more readily than in himself. Things that are hideous and repulsive in the lives of others seem quite respectable in his own.

But the fact that he can condemn sins in others shows that he knows the difference between right and wrong. If he knows it's wrong for someone to steal his wife, then he knows it's wrong for him to steal someone else's wife. Therefore, when a man commits the very sins which he condemns in others, he leaves himself without excuse.

The sins of cultured people are essentially the same as those of the heathen. Although a moralist may argue that he has not committed every sin in the book, he should remember the following facts. First of all, he's capable of committing them all.

Second, by breaking one commandment, he's guilty of all. James 2.10. And third, he has committed sins of thought which he may never have committed in actual deed, and these are forbidden by the word. Jesus taught that the lustful look, for instance, is tantamount to adultery.

Matthew 6.28. Verse two. What the smug moralist needs is a lesson on the judgment of God. The apostle Paul proceeds to give that lesson in verses two through sixteen.

The first point is that the judgment of God is according to truth. It is not based on evidence that is incomplete, inaccurate, or circumstantial. Rather, it is based on the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

Secondly, the judgment of God is inescapable on those who condemn others for the very sins they practice themselves. Their capacity to judge others does not absolve them from guilt. In fact, it increases their own condemnation.

When we say that the judgment of God is inescapable, we mean unless those sins are repented of and forgiven. Verse four. Next, we learn why the judgment of is not executed immediately.

This delay is an evidence of the goodness and forbearance and longsuffering of God. His goodness means that he is kindly disposed to sinners, though not to their sins. His forbearance describes his holding back punishment on man's wickedness and rebellion.

His longsuffering is his amazing self-restraint in spite of man's ceaseless provocation. The goodness of God, as seen in his providence, protection, and preservation, is aimed at leading men to repentance. He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

Second Peter 3.9. Repentance means an about-face, turning one's back on sin and heading in the opposite direction. It signifies a man's taking sides with God against himself and his sins. It's more than an intellectual assent to the fact of one's sins.

It involves the conscience, too. As John Newton wrote, my conscience felt and owned my guilt. Verse five.

The fourth thing we learn about the judgment of God is that it is graduated according to the accumulation of guilt. Paul pictures hardened and unrepentant sinners stockpiling judgment for themselves as if they were building up a fortune of gold and silver. But what a fortune that will be in the day when God's wrath is finally revealed at the judgment of the great white throne.

Revelation 20 verses 11 through 15. In that day, the judgment of God will be seen to be absolutely righteous, without prejudice or injustice of any kind. Verse six.

In the next five verses, Paul reminds us that the judgment of God will be according to works. The key here is that a man's works reveal what he really is and whether he has saving faith. But it is a man's works as God sees them.

God is the judge, and he's the only one who can invariably know which works are the fruit of genuine faith. We can be deceived in the matter, but he cannot. Verse seven.

Thus, when God finds a man who, by steadfastly persevering and well-doing, seeks for glory and honor in incorruption, he will award that man eternal life. Does this mean that the man earns eternal life by his well-doing? No way. Rather, it means that the whole tenor of his life shows that he has already been saved by grace through faith.

And although he already has eternal life in one sense, yet he will receive it in its fullness when he is finally delivered from the presence of sin and receives his glorified body. Only a true believer can persist in well-doing. The first good work a person can ever do is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then a life of well-doing follows. The true believer seeks for glory and honor in incorruption. The glory of heaven, the honor that comes from God only, John 5.44, the incorruption that characterizes the resurrection body, 1 Corinthians 15.53 and 54, and the heavenly inheritance, 1 Peter 1.4. This verse, that is, verse seven, must not be used to teach salvation by works.

Chaffer points out that about 150 passages in the New Testament condition salvation on faith or believing. No one verse rightly understood could contradict such overwhelming testimony. Verse eight, those who are factious and who obey unrighteousness rather than the truth show by these works that they are

unregenerate.

They will receive wrath and indignation when they stand before the Lord. A factious man is a self-seeking hireling who creates divisions and fosters a party spirit. Those who obey unrighteousness as a master deliberately choose not to obey Christ, who is the truth.

Verse nine, as if for emphasis, the apostle goes over the two kinds of works and the two verdicts, only this time in inverse order. The verdict will be tribulation and anguish to everyone who works evil. Here again we must stress that these evil works betray an evil heart of unbelief.

The works are the outward expression of the person's attitude toward the Lord. The expression to the Jew first and also to the Greek shows that the judgment of God will be according to privilege or light received. This is another principle concerning the judgment of God.

It will be according to privilege or light received. The Jews were first in privilege as God's chosen earthly people, therefore they will be first in responsibility. This aspect of God's judgment will be developed further in verses 12 through 15.

Verse 10, the verdict will be glory, honor, and peace to everyone, Jew and Gentile, who works good. Let us not forget that no one can work good as far as God is concerned unless he has first placed his faith and trust in the Lord Jesus. The gospel was preached to the Jews first, then to the Gentiles, but in Christ the Jew has no advantage.

All believers are one in Christ Jesus. Verse 11, another truth concerning the judgment of God is that it is without respect of persons. In human courts of law, preference is shown to the good-looking, the wealthy, and the influential, but God is strictly impartial.

No considerations of race, place, or faith will ever influence Him. Verse 12, as mentioned above, verses 12 through 16 expand the point that the judgment of God will be according to the measure of light received. Two classes are in view, those who do not have the law, the Gentiles, and those who are under the law, the Jews.

This takes in everyone except those who are in the church of God. See 1 Corinthians 10, 32, where the human race is divided into three classes, the Jew, the Gentile, the church of God. Those who have sinned without the law shall perish without the law.

Notice that it does not say, shall be judged without the law, but shall perish without the law. They will be judged according to whatever revelation the Lord gave them, and failing to live up to that revelation, they will perish. Those who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law, and if they have not obeyed it, they too will perish.

Verse 13, mere possession of the law is not enough. The law demands perfect and continuous obedience. No one is accounted righteous simply because he knows what the law says.

The only conceivable way of obtaining justification under the law would be to keep it in its entirety, but since all men are sinners, it's impossible for them to do this. So this verse is really setting forth an ideal and not something that is capable of human attainment. The New Testament teaches emphatically that it's impossible for man to be justified by law-keeping.

We find this in Acts 13.39, Romans 3.20, Galatians 2.16, and verse 21, Galatians 3.11. It was never God's intention that anyone be saved by the law. Even if a person could keep the law perfectly from this day forward, he still would not be justified because God requires that which is passed. So when this verse, that is verse 13, says that doers of the law shall be justified, we must understand it as meaning that the law demands obedience, and if anyone could produce complete obedience, he would be justified.

But the cold hard fact is that no one can produce it. Verse 14, this verse and the following verse are a parenthesis looking back to verse 12a. There we learn that Gentiles who sin without the law shall perish without the law.

Now Paul explains that although the law was not given to the Gentiles, yet they have an innate knowledge of right and wrong. They know instinctively that it is wrong to lie, steal, commit adultery, and murder. The only commandment they would not know intuitively is the one concerning the Sabbath.

That one is more ceremonial than moral. So what it boils down to is that the Gentiles who do not have the law are a law unto themselves. They form their own code of right and wrong behavior from their moral instincts.

Verse 15, they show the work of the law written in their hearts. Notice it is not the law that is written in their hearts, but the work of the law. The work which the law was designed to do in the lives of the Israelites is seen in some measure at least in the lives of Gentiles.

The fact that they know that it is right to respect their parents, for example, shows the work of the law written in their hearts. They also know that certain acts are basically wrong. Their conscience, serving as a monitor, confirms this instinctive knowledge, and their thoughts are constantly deciding the rightness or wrongness of their actions, excusing or accusing, allowing or forbidding.

Verse 16, this verse is a continuation of the thought in verse 12. It tells when those without law and those under the law will be judged, and in doing so it teaches one final truth about the judgment of God, namely that it will take into account the secrets of men, not just their public sin. Secret sin at the present time will be open scandal at the judgment of the great white throne.

The judge at that solemn time will be Jesus Christ, since the Father has committed all judgment to him. John 5.22. When Paul adds here, according to my gospel, he means, so my gospel declares. That's the way it's translated in the New English Bible.

Verse 17, the apostle has a third class to deal with, so now he turns to the question, are the Jews to whom the law was given also lost? And of course the answer is yes, they are lost too. There's no doubt that many Jews felt that they were immune from God's judgment. God would never send a Jew to hell, they thought.

The Gentiles, on the other hand, were fuel for the flames of hell. Paul must now destroy this pretension by showing that Gentiles under certain circumstances may be closer to God than Jews. First he reviews those things which a Jew prized as giving him an inside track with God.

And here are some of the things that the Jew prized. He bore the name of a Jew, thus was a member of God's chosen earthly people. He rested upon the law, which was never designed to give rest, but rather to awaken the conscience to a sense of sinfulness.

He gloried in God, the only true God who had entered into a unique covenant relationship with the nation of Israel. And then in verse 18, he knew God's will, because a general outline of that will is given in the scriptures, and he approved the things that are excellent, because the law taught him how to assess moral values. Verse 19, he prided himself on being a guide of those who were morally and spiritually blind, a light to those who were in the darkness of ignorance.

Verse 20, he felt qualified to correct the foolish or untaught, and to teach babes, because the law gave him an outline of knowledge and of the truth. Verse 21, but these things in which the Jew boasted had never been allowed to change his life. It was pride of race, religion, and knowledge, without any corresponding moral transformation.

He taught others, but they did not take the lessons to heart. He preached against stealing, but did not practice what he preached. Verse 22, when he forbade adultery, it was a case of do as I say, not as I do.

While he loathed and abhorred idols, he didn't hesitate to rob temples, perhaps by actually looting heathen shrines. Verse 23, he gloried in the possession of the law, but dishonored the God who gave it by breaking its sacred precepts. Verse 24, this combination of high talk and low walk caused the Gentiles to blaspheme the name of God.

They judged the Lord, as men always do, by those who professed to be his followers. It was true in Isaiah's day, Isaiah 52.5, and it is still true today. Each of us should ask, if of Jesus Christ their only view may be what they see of him in you, what do they see? Verse 25, in addition to the law, the Jew prided himself on the right of circumcision.

This was a minor surgical operation performed on the foreskin of the Jewish male. It was instituted by God as a sign of his covenant with Abraham. It expressed the separation of a people to God from the world.

After a while, the Jews so prided themselves on having had the operation that they contemptuously called the Gentiles the uncircumcision. Here Paul links circumcision with the law of Moses and points out that it was only valid as a sign when it was combined with a life of obedience. God is not a ritualist.

He is not satisfied with external ceremonies unless they are accompanied by inward holiness. So a circumcised Jew who transgresses the law might just as well be uncircumcised. When the apostle speaks about keepers or doers of the law in this passage, we must not take the words with extreme literalness.

After all, no one keeps the law perfectly. Paul could only mean those who keep the law in a comparative sense. Verse 26.

Thus if a Gentile adheres to the morality prescribed by the law, even if he isn't under the law, his uncircumcision is more acceptable than the circumcision of a Jewish transgressor. In such a case, the Gentile's heart is circumcised and that is what counts. Verse 27.

And in such a case, the superior behavior of the Gentile condemns the Jew who has the law and circumcision, but who does not keep the law or live the circumcised life. That is, the life of separation and sanctification. Verse 28.

In God's reckoning, a true Jew is not simply a man who has Abraham's blood flowing in his veins, or who has the mark of circumcision in his body. A person may have both these things and be the scum of the earth morally. The Lord is not swayed by external considerations of race or religion.

He looks for inward sincerity and purity. And then verse 29. The real Jew is the one who is not only a descendant of Abraham, but who also manifests a godly life.

This does not mean that all believers are Jews, or that the church is the Israel of God. Paul is talking about Jews and is insisting that the accident of birth and the ordinance of circumcision are not enough. There must also be inward reality.

True circumcision is a matter of the heart, not just a literal cutting of the body, but the spiritual reality of surgery on the old unregenerate nature. Those who thus combine the outward sign and the inward grace receive God's praise, if not men's. There's a play on words in this last verse that is not apparent in the English.

The word Jew comes from Judah, meaning praise. A real Jew is one whose character is such as to receive praise from God. That brings us to chapter three, verse one.

Paul continues the subject of the guilt of the Jews in the first eight verses of this chapter. And here a Jewish objector appears and begins to cross-examine the apostle, and the questioning proceeds as follows. Here in verse one, the objector says, if all you have said in chapter two, verses seventeen through twenty-nine, is true, then what's the superiority of being a Jew, and what benefit is there from circumcision? Paul answers in verse two.

He says, the Jew has had many special privileges. The most important is that this people were entrusted with the oracles of God. The Old Testament scriptures were given to Jews to write and to preserve, but how have the people of Israel responded to this tremendous privilege? On the whole, they have demonstrated an appalling lack of faith.

Well, the objector comes back in verse three, and he says, granted that not all Jews have believed, does that mean that God will go back on his promises? After all, he did choose Israel as his people, and he did make definite covenants with them. Can the unbelief of some cause God to break his word? And Paul answers in verse four, don't even suggest such a thing. Whenever there's a question between God or man and who is right, always proceed on the basis that God is right, and every man is a liar.

That's what David did in Psalm 51, verse four. He said, the complete truthfulness of all you say must be defended, and you must be vindicated every time you're called into question by sinful man. And so, Paul adds, our sins only serve to confirm the truthfulness of God's word.

Now, the objector says in verse five, if that's the case, why does God condemn us? If our unrighteousness causes the righteousness of God to shine more gloriously, how can God visit us with wrath? Paul injects here that in quoting these words, he's using a typically human argument. And then in verse six, he answers the argument. He says, such an argument is unworthy of serious consideration.

If there were any possibility of God's being unrighteous, how then would he be fit to judge the world? Yet we all admit that he will judge the world. But the Jewish objector is not through. In verse seven, he says, if my sin brings glory to God, if my lie vindicates his truth, if he causes man's wrath to praise him, then how can he consistently find fault with me as a sinner? Why would, in verse eight, he goes on to say, why wouldn't it be logical to say, and then Paul interrupts, let me interrupt to say that some people actually accuse us Christians of using this argument, but it is a slander.

The objector goes on, why wouldn't it be logical to say, let us do evil that good may come? And Paul answers, all I can say is that the condemnation of people who talk like this is well deserved. Now we might just pause here to mention that this last argument, stupid as it seems, is constantly leveled against the gospel of the grace of God. People say, if you could be saved just by faith in Christ, then you could go out and live in sin.

Since God's grace super abounds over man's sin, then the more you sin, the more his grace abounds. The apostle answers this objection in chapter six. We'll come to that later.

In verse nine, the objector says, are you saying then that we Jews are no better than those sinful Gentiles? And that leads us up to and parallels the next question in Paul's presentation. He has shown that the heathen are lost, the self-righteous moralists, both Jews and Gentiles, are lost. The Jews are lost.

Now he turns to the question, are all men lost? The answer is yes, we have already charged that all men are slaves to sin. That means that Jews are no different from Gentiles in this respect. Verse 10, if further proof is needed, that proof is found in the Old Testament scriptures.

First, we see that sin has affected everyone born of human parents verses 10 through 12, and then we see that sin has affected every part of a man, verses 13 through 18. There is not one righteous person. That's quoted from Psalm 14, verse 11.

There's no one who has a right understanding of God. There's no one who seeks after God. Psalm 14 2. If left to himself, fallen men would never seek after God.

It's only through the work of the Holy Spirit that anyone ever does. Verse 12, all have gone astray from God. All mankind has been corrupt.

There's not one who lives a good life. No, not one. Psalm 14 3. Verse 13, men's throats are like an open tomb.

Their speech has been consistently deceitful. Psalm 5 9. Their conversation flows from poisonous lips. Psalm 140, verse 3. Verse 14, their mouths are full of cursing and hatred.

Psalm 10, verse 7. Verse 15, their feet are swift to carry them on missions of murder. That's quoted from Isaiah 59, verse 7. Verse 16, they leave a trail of ruin and misery. That's quoted from Isaiah 59, verse 7. Verse 17, they have never known how to make peace.

Isaiah 59 8. Verse 18, they have no respect for God. Psalm 36 1. This, then, is God's x-ray of the human race. It reveals universal unrighteousness, verse 10.

Ignorance and independence toward God, verse 11. Waywardness, unprofitableness, and lack of any goodness, verse 12. Man's throat is full of rotteness.

His tongue is deceitful. His lips are venomous. His mouth is full of swearing.

His feet are bent on murder. He leaves behind trouble and destruction. He doesn't know how to make peace, and he has no regard for God.

Here we see the total depravity of man, by which we mean that sin has affected all mankind, and that it has affected every part of his being. We do not mean that every man has committed every sin, but he has

a nature that is capable of committing them all. Verse 19.

When God gave the law to Israel, he was using Israel as a sample of the human race. He found that Israel was a failure and applied this finding to all humanity. The same is when a health inspector takes a test tube of water from a well, tests the sample, finds it polluted, then pronounces the entire well polluted.

So Paul explains that when the law speaks, it speaks to those who are under the law, that is, the people of Israel, in order that every mouth, both Jew and Gentile, may be stopped, and all the world be brought in guilty before God. Verse 20. No one can be justified by keeping the law.

The law was not given to justify, but to produce the knowledge of sin. Not the knowledge of salvation, but the knowledge of sin. We could never know what a crooked line is unless we also knew a straight line.

The law is like a straight line. When men test themselves by it, they see how crooked they are. We can use a mirror to see that our face is dirty, but the mirror is not designed to wash the dirty face.

A thermometer will tell whether a person has a fever, but swallowing the thermometer will not cure the fever. The law is good when it is used to produce conviction of sin, but it is worthless as a savior from sin. When we come to verse 21, we come to the heart of the letter, and Paul will answer the question, according to the gospel, how can sinners be justified by a holy God?

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