



5.
**'Why morality doesn't cut the
mustard'**
Romans 2.1-16

Background

In the previous section of the letter (Rom.1.18-32) Paul had described in broad brush strokes how depraved humanity is, and how that depravity plays out in a society's life. What you're seeing, he argued, is the wrath of God as a present reality: a warning, that is, that there's a day coming when the righteous God will exercise His righteous judgment on all humanity.

In this next section (2.1-16) he anticipates that there will be those who assume that they'll get 'the nod of approval' from the Lord ("*.. will be declared righteous*") on the basis of their having lived in an upright sort of way. They're able, in a self-righteous manner, to point the finger at the faults and flaws in the lives of others, and assure themselves thereby that (certainly by comparison with such individuals) they will be judged as 'righteous'.

It's a common enough perspective to this day, of course. When asked on what basis they think they'll make it to heaven, there are many who will respond by saying it's because they've lived a good life. The apostle Paul himself had taken that view in a manner of living which he was able to describe in these terms – "*as for righteousness based on the law, faultless*" ([Phil.3.6](#)).

In 16 short verses Paul exposes the flaws in that perspective – always with a view to showing why it is that each and every one of us needs the Lord Jesus and that righteousness which He has secured and gives. His basic thesis is that everyone (including those who are morally upright and 'good') is 'without excuse' (he uses the same word in 2.1 as he'd used in 1.20), and why none will be able to stand in the day of judgment.

In the gospel, he'd said, the righteousness of God is revealed (1.17). At the heart of his argument here, therefore, is a series of statements about the righteous judgment of God which His righteous character necessarily entails.

This series of statements is in some ways his own testimony as to how such an upright, clean-living man as himself had been brought to see the truth about himself and his need of God's grace in Christ.

Read the whole passage; if short of time start with **'days' (3), (4) & (6)**.

1) Monday 5th February – without excuse

Read [Romans 2.1](#)

“.. you, therefore, have no excuse ..” (Rom.2.1)

Pointing a critical finger at someone else shows that judgment isn't an alien concept to you. But you tend most readily to see and dislike in others those faults which are all too evident (at least to others) in yourself. Condemning others condemns yourself!

Should believers refrain from making critical comments about the conduct of others around them?

What's the difference between 'judging' the conduct of others and being judgmental?

Prayer: *Keep me, Lord, from a critical spirit which sees only the faults in others. Make me more aware of my own shortcomings and sin than those of others around me.*

2) Tuesday 6th February – without escape

Read [Romans 2.2-3](#)

“.. God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth ..” (Rom.2.2)

Our ability to judge others is at best always partial and therefore flawed: not so the Lord who judges rightly, in full knowledge of all the relevant details. If you, with limited 'sight', can still see the faults in others, be sure that God sees all that's wrong in you!

Read [Matt.7.1-5](#): what is the point that Jesus is making in these verses – and how does this affect the way we relate and respond to others?

Why do we tend so easily to recognise in others faults which are also true of ourselves?

Prayer: *Not the labours of my hands can fulfil Thy law's demands. Could my zeal, no respite know, could my tears for ever flow, all for sin could not atone, Thou must save and Thou alone.*

3) Wednesday 7th February – without remorse

Read [Romans 2.4](#)

“.. God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance ..” (Rom.2.4)

Blessed (presumably) with able Bible teachers and a good synagogue pedigree, the Pharisee in the [story](#) Jesus told fasted regularly and gave generously: God's kindness, though, made him censorious rather than contrite. Consider God's kindness to you.

What is Paul referring to when he speaks of God's kindness etc?

In what ways have you experienced the kindness of God?

In what ways is 'contempt' for the riches of God's kindness, forbearance and patience shown today?

With a zeal for God's glory and delight in God's Word, how can you ensure that repentance rather than reproof is the constant character of your living?

Prayer: What riches of kindness You've lavished on us, Your blood, was the payment, Your life was the cost. Our sins they are many – Your mercy is more! Thank You, Lord!

4) Thursday 8th February – grace and good works

Read [Romans 2.5-8](#)

".. God 'will repay each person according to what they have done' .." (Rom.2.6)

'A persistence in doing good' is the fruit and proof of the gracious renewing work of God's Spirit in believers – and eternal life is His righteous gift. A self-confident, truth-rejecting persistence in 'doing it yourself' leads only to wrath. Judgment is coming!

Read [Matt.7.15-20](#), the first part of the climax to Jesus' 'sermon on the mount': what is the point He was making and how does it apply to ourselves?

How would you answer a person who argued that these verses make clear that we are saved by our works?

What does Paul mean by our seeking 'glory, honour and immortality'?

How will that 'persistence in doing good' find expression in our lives?

How is the fact that we are *judged* by our works compatible with the gospel message that we are *justified* by grace through our faith?

Prayer: No condemnation now I dread; You, Lord, and all in You, is mine! Alive in You, my living Head, and clothed in righteousness divine, bold I approach the eternal throne.

5) Friday 9th February – Jesus and doing good

Read [Romans 2.9-11](#)

".. God does not show favouritism .." (Rom.2.11)

We are saved by grace; certainly not *by* good works, but as certainly *unto* good works – the work of the Spirit transforming us into the likeness of Jesus who went around 'doing good'. There's one standard; one question – will God recognise His Son in you?

Why does Paul twice draw the distinction between 'the Jew' and 'the Gentile' when he insists that 'God does not show favouritism'?

In what ways can you see that the Spirit's gracious work in your life has resulted in your 'going around doing good' (see [Acts 10.38](#))?

Prayer: Thank You, O my Father, for giving us Your Son, and leaving Your Spirit 'til the work on earth is done. Cleanse me from sin, O God, and conform me to Your Son.

6) Saturday 10th February – privilege and responsibility

Read [Romans 2.12-15](#)

“.. it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous ..” (Rom.2.13)

The gift by God of His written Word supplements the truth He's written on our consciences, whereby even without His Word we know what's right. You have, read, and know the Bible? That only makes your failure to *do* it the more culpable!

Read [Matt.7.21-23](#): what does Jesus mean by saying to those who have owned His lordship and served in His name, “I never knew you”?

Read [Luke 12.35-48](#): **how does this challenge you in respect of all that you have been given?**

How would you answer someone who argued that it's surely not fair of God to judge those who've never had the Bible and never heard of Jesus?

Are those who have never heard of Jesus nonetheless hell-bound, and if so why?

Prayer: Help me, Lord, to hide Your Word in my heart, to do Your will in my daily life, and to trust Your Son alone to cover all my shortcomings and sin. For His Name's sake.

7) Sunday 11th February – resurrection and judgment

Read [Romans 2.16](#)

“.. the day when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ ..” (Rom.2.16)

A day of final reckoning is coming. What you may have kept hidden from others is never hidden from God: but is it covered by Christ? And is your living being transformed by the Spirit? Forgiveness is matched by renewal: judgment reveals all.

As part of her gospel proclamation do we speak clearly and urgently enough about both the certainty and the consequences of a coming day of judgement?

How does the awareness of that coming day of judgment impact your living?

*Prayer: Your resurrection from the dead, Lord Jesus, assures me that **You** will judge the earth – and that Your work is now complete! How I praise You as I trust You!*