

Start your study here

Romans 2:1-16

- 1 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.
- 2 We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who do such things.
- 3 Do you suppose, O man—
you who judge those who do such things
and yet do them yourself—
that you will escape the judgment of God?
- 4 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?
- 5 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.
- 6 He will render to each one according to his works:
7 to those who by patience in well-doing
seek for glory and honor and immortality,
he will give eternal life;
8 but for those who are self-seeking
and do not obey the truth,
but obey unrighteousness,
there will be wrath and fury.
- 9 There will be tribulation and distress for every human being
who does evil,
the Jew first and also the Greek,
10 but glory and honor and peace
for everyone who does good,
the Jew first and also the Greek.
- 11 For God shows no partiality.
- 12 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.
- 13 For it is not the hearers of the law
who are righteous before God,
but the doers of the law who will be justified.
- 14 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.
- 15 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
- 16 on that day when,
according to my gospel,
God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus. (ESV)

Passage goes from general to specific—applicable to all, with a focus on the Jew
Logical development see 1:18-20, 32
Here he uses a rhetorical device: dialogue with imaginary opponent

Review: Paul theme—The Gospel, the power of God for Salvation reveals God's righteousness—Paul continues to show why this salvation is necessary
Observations: 1) Notice God is the only righteous judge 2) that the judging is done based on work 3) the self-righteous (and all) are not able to meet the standard
Key Question: How do we presume / take for granted the forbearance and kindness of God?

Romans 2:1-16

Condemnation of the self-righteous

1 **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.

The condemnation is to those who judge other—the self-righteous moralist—who is actually a hypocrite

See 1:32 "practice" / developed in 2:17-29

reason

1:32

2 We know that the **judgment of God** rightly falls on those who do such things.

God's judgment is righteous (He is the standard)

3 **Do you suppose**, O man—

you who judge those who do such things and **yet do them yourself**—

Repetition—just in case the reader missed it

The root sin—Self-righteous hypocrisy, judgmental-ness, assumption of superiority
Aimed at those who were applauding the previous section w/o seeing its application to them

that you will escape the **judgment of God**?

4 **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?

only occurrence in Romans

Key concept—God's kindness intended to cause repentance
Do we practice evil or are we too comfortable with sin—believing God won't discipline us?

5 **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.

Returns to this 2:16
Section is about judgment

"render" = reward, recompense

Principle

6 He will render to each one according to his works:

God's judgment is impartiality—same standard for all

See more on the structure of this section below

7 to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality,

8 **he will give eternal life;**

Key Exegetical issues see notes below

Caution: this section is difficult, partly because the whole of 2:1-29 must be kept in mind and compared to what Paul will say in 3:20 and all of chapter 4. See additional notes below

but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness,

9 there will be wrath and fury.

Standard of Judgment
2:2, 5 God's judgment is righteous / Truth based on reality
2:6ff God's judgment is impartiality based on man's works
2:16 God's judgment in Jesus Christ based on God's revelation of His will

9 There will be **tribulation and distress** for every human being who does evil,

➤ the Jew first and also the Greek

1:16

"first" emphasizes there are no exemptions no special privilege

10 but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good,

➤ the Jew first and also the Greek

προσωπολημψία—idiom "to accept the face," to judge based on externals, so show favoritism. Here with οὐ "no" therefore: to show no partiality, no favoritism, to be impartial

11 **For God shows no partiality.**

Answers the question why people are judged based on works.

Principle

12 **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.

Explanatory: since God is impartial, this is how He judges

Notice parallelisms

Key concept—The justice of God, He is impartial. This section continues the previous thought that God judges based on works. Jews who transgress the law are indicted—Paul removes any salvific value to possession of the law

13 **For** it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, **but the doers of the law who will be justified.**

Key Exegetical issues see notes below

14 **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.

Key question: is every use of the word "law" a reference to the Mosaic Law?

15 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

How is this related to New Covenant? "written on their hearts"

16 **on that day** when, according to my gospel, **God judges** the secrets of men by Christ Jesus. (ESV)

Summary Conclusion: God will show (reward or repay) all the works of man

God's judgment in Christ Jesus

In order to reward or punish 2:6

Review: The Jews, became like Gentiles by doing "the same things" and are subject to God's wrath (vv. 1 – 5). Blessings requires more than heritage it required obedience.

Working Idea (this is to help you see how the main idea was developed)

All need the gospel
regardless of heredity
because all sin
some are self-righteous (focal point in this section, particularly Jewish self-righteousness)
but their own works reveal the condition of their hearts
God judges all impartially based on works—and nothing goes unseen

Focal Point of the Passage: **God is just—impartially judges based on works.**

This will sound like “works salvation” but notice the end of the passage—God will repay or **reward** based on actions or works. The passage is about condemnation for those who think possession of the law (their heredity) is enough to give them a free pass with God. Paul’s point, possession of the law is not enough—one must live in accord with its standards, for God will be impartial—judging those with and without the law in the same way—based on their works. (In the next couple of sections he will show that no one can live up to the standard on their own.)

Main idea:

For the original audience—this passage was intended to expose the self-righteous (most-likely) Jews as they applauded the condemnation of the immoral idolaters (1:18-32) not understanding its application to them. So Paul turns and points his pen at them and shows how their self-righteousness and pride in their possession of the law was not enough to keep them out of the category of “sinners” who deserve punishment.

To us—We should not presume on God’s kindness through arrogance in our position, heritage (family, country, etc.) or for that matter our possessions or any privileges we may think we have—God is an impartial just judge.

Key Phrase: God’s kindness intended to cause repentance

Catch Phrase: Don’t presume on God’s kindness

Outline

Condemnation of the Self-Righteous Moralists: God’s standard not theirs **2:1-16**
Condemnation according to Divine Standards
The Up and Outer
They judge others not themselves therefore condemning themselves

The standard God uses for judging
Truthfulness 2:1-4
God’s judgment is righteous based on the reality of the situation
The inferential “therefore” 2:1 is connected to the whole of 1:18-32

God’s wrath is revealed against all those who suppress the truth of God (1:18–32). Therefore you are without excuse when you judge others (2:1a) because you practice the very things you condemn in others (2:1b). ¹
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¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans, Baker exegetical commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1998). 106.

Impartiality 2:5-11

God's judgment is impartial based on man's works

<i>Judgment according to Works: Romans 2:6-8</i>			
Person	Rule of Life	Object of Life	Reward
Righteous	Persevere in good works	Seek Glory Honor Immortality	Eternal Life
Unrighteous	Selfish ambitions	Disobey truth Obey unrighteousness	Wrath Anger

God judges people's works, meting out reward and judgment

Jesus Christ 2:12-16

God's judgment is based on the revelation of His will

Teaching Ideas

Key concept—God's kindness intended to cause repentance

Observations:

- 1) Notice God is the only righteous Judge
- 2) that the judging is done based on works (actions)
- 3) the self-righteous (and all) are not able to meet the standard

Key Question: How do we presume / take for granted the forbearance and kindness of God?

Personal Applicational Point

Do we practice evil or are we too comfortable with sin—believing God won't discipline us?
Have we become too comfortable with sin in our own life (anger, lust, covetousness) but harsh towards others sins (drinking, dress, movies, etc.)?

Involving and Engaging Activities

Questions

- How have you seen God's kindness lead you to repentance?
We often hear people say that they "hit rock bottom" and then repented.
Would you characterize that as "God's kindness" or God's judgment?
- How does the fact that God's judgment is based on works related to salvation by faith apart from works?

Teacher's note: It's OK to create tension in your class—this passage has some natural tension points that people will want to soften. You will need to keep people from looking ahead in the book. They need to understand the development of Paul's thought before jumping to solutions. The students' tendency will be to answer questions out of their theological context rather than deal with the difficulties in the passage.

Theological and contextualization

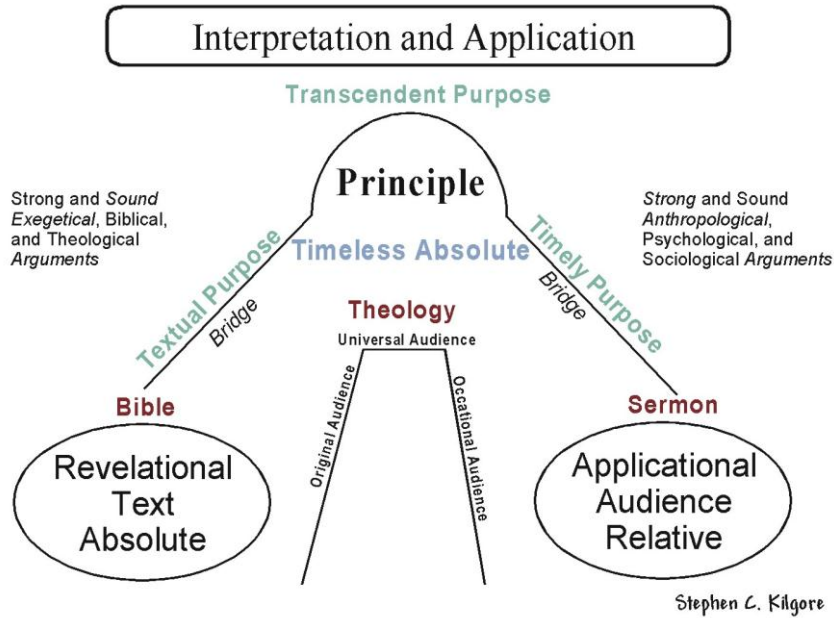
You may need to make sure your class understands the historical situation. Moo's commentary does a good job of explaining that the intended audience was Jewish. And that Jews have a special relationship with God that no other people do.

It may be helpful to draw something like the chart below to help people understand how we study a passage that has specific historical referents (texts address to a specific group that we are not a part of).

Remember: a few key "rules" of Bible Study

- Rules 1-3 Context, Context, Context Context Rules!
- Rule 4 We can't make a text mean something it never meant.

A text can't mean what it never meant—don't read into a text
Rule 5 Understand the difference between descriptive and prescriptive narratives
We often must seek to understand the principle behind a passage or promise to understand how it applies to us.



Practical

Since most of your class members will have been Christians for some time, it is important to show how easy it is to presume on God's kindness in one's own life and to be judgmental about someone else's actions.

Areas in which we become judgmental:

National

We feel that we are "a blessed nation" and that the actions of our nation should be blessed by God. We then judge people from other nations, not on how they respond to God, but to our nation.

Political

We affiliate ourselves with a political party and assume that all Christians would need to be members of that party to be Christians. Do we judge other Christians based on their political views or their response and obedience to God?

Racial

Though God is impartial and His decisions are not based on nationality, ethnicity, skin color, we are not color blind. We tend to believe stereotypes and form judgments based on those stereotypes.

External appearance

How people dress
What people participate in

The Point

The problem is that we can become too comfortable with sin in our own life (anger, lust, covetousness) but harsh towards others sins (drinking, dress, movies, etc.)

Therefore, this is a lesson in which you should allow plenty of time for interaction and particularly application.

Context

Overview—Romans 1:18—3:20				
	1:18-32	2:1-16	2:17—3:8	3:9-20
Who is Paul addressing?	Pagan	Moralist	Jew	World (everyone)
How do they relate to God?	Disregard God	Try to distract God	Brag about relationship	No one seeks God
What is their problem?	Knowingly reject God Idolatry / Immorality	Judgmental	Self-righteousness hypocrisy	Sin
Favorite Phrase?	Live it up	Straighten up	You get to work	(Cursing and bitterness)
Goal?	Satisfy own passions	Monitor their neighbor	Measure their merit	Autonomy
View of Sin?	No one is guilty	They are guilty, not me	Privileged not guilty I'm guilty but privileged overcome	No regard (no fear)
Boundaries?	If it feels good, do it.	If they feel good, note it.	If it feels good, stop it.	None
Paul's Judgment?	You have no excuse for the things you do	You have no authority for the judgments you make	You have no solution for the problem you have	You have no hope in yourself
Key Verse	1:24	2:1	2:23 4:5	3:9-11
Summary	Condemnation: The Universal Need for God's Righteousness			

Key Exegetical Issues to be aware of:

2:3

We should not miss, however, the reason Paul introduces the **theme of judging**, for it is prominent in verse 1 and reiterated in verse 3. The inconsistency and self-deception of the Jews were thereby highlighted. They were inconsistent because they ended up doing the very things that they condemned in the Gentiles. **The correct moral judgments that they uttered against the Gentiles ironically enough turned out to be indictments of themselves.** They were self-deceived because, even though they practiced evil, they harbored the hope that they would escape from God's judgment (v. 3). The use of ἦ (ē, or) in verse 4 signals a heightening of the argument (Cranfield 1975: 144). The Jews were not only self-deceived and blind to their own actions; they were also scorning the kindness and patience of God, who had not brought immediate judgment upon them.^{2 3}

2:4 Repentance

Paul introduces a theme here that he develops in more detail later: **the law itself provides no ability to keep it.** The Mosaic covenant is unable to produce what God intends. Perhaps this is why Paul does not speak much of repentance, since repentance centers on what human beings do in order to obtain God's favor. Paul certainly believed that repentance was necessary, but he emphasized the work of the Holy Spirit since the repentant heart owes its transformation to his glorious work (cf. Laato 1991: 208).⁴

2:6, 7-10, 13 A potentially controversial passage

Structure can be viewed three ways—each highlighting a different aspect

²Stuhlmacher (1994: 39–40) notes that the insistence on repentance indicates that Paul had not eliminated the difference between Jews and Gentiles, for the former were called to repentance precisely because of God's special favor to them.

³Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker exegetical commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1998). 108.

⁴Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, 109.

First—the way I showed it in the rewrite above—where parallelism is in view but from a larger context. So verses 9-10 are seen in parallel to verse 2 (even 1-2).

A second way to see the structure of 6-11 is through tight parallelism

6 God recompenses based on works

7 to those who seek glory/honor/immortality—eternal life

8 to those who are self-seeking disobey the truth/obey unrighteousness—wrath and fury

9 all (Jew or Greek) that practice evil—will receive tribulation and distress

10 all (Jew or Greek) that practice good—will receive glory/honor/peace

11 God shows no partiality

Another way to see the structure is through inverted parallelism (chiasm)

6 God recompenses based on works

7 to those who seek glory/honor/immortality—eternal life

8 to those who are self-seeking disobey the truth/obey unrighteousness—wrath and fury

9 all (Jew or Greek) that practice evil—will receive tribulation and distress

10 all (Jew or Greek) that practice good—will receive glory/honor/peace

The most interesting question relates to the implications of these verses. **Did Paul believe that some could obtain eternal life by doing good works?** How does this fit with his claim that no one can be righteous before God by the works of the law (Rom. 3:20)?⁴ **The main reason Paul introduced the issue of repayment according to works is to show the Jews that God is impartial, that there will be no special favoritism for them.**⁵ The connection forged between verses 5 and 6 supports this view. The Jews are storing up wrath for themselves because God renders to each person in accord with his or her works. He states twice that repayment in accord with works applies “to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (vv. 9–10). **By underlining the priority of the Jews Paul stresses that they are not exempt from the principle of retribution according to works.** Indeed, like Amos (Amos 3:2) Paul implies that the special privilege of the Jews involves greater responsibility (cf. Zeller 1973: 150–51). One should conclude, then, **that Paul’s primary purpose is to argue that Jews who lack good works will not escape judgment.**⁵

Moo does a good job of explaining the key views on this section and provided the simplest, straightforward solution that reflects the larger context of Romans 1:18-3:19. (Please read carefully pages 80-83)

I will quote a section from his commentary below and then give a slightly different perspective to show the difficulty and need to be honest with the text.

Salvation by works? In **verses 6 – 11** Paul “levels the playing field” for Jew and Gentile. Both, Paul affirms, will be judged impartially by God on the basis of works. Doing evil will bring wrath, but doing good will bring “eternal life” (v. 7).

But how can Paul say that doing good will lead to eternal life? Does he not make clear elsewhere that our “works” can never put us in right relationship with God (cf. 3:20; Eph. 2:11)? His apparently optimistic view of the possibility of salvation apart from explicit faith in God surfaces later in this chapter (2:13 – 16, 26 – 27). It constitutes an explosive theological issue, especially in our day of pluralism. We will have to deal with each of these other texts in turn, but interpreters take five basic approaches to the problem here.

⁴ For a more detailed analysis of the various positions relating to righteousness by works in Rom. 2 and my own resolution of the problem, see Schreiner 1993a.

⁵ Bassler (1982: 121) concludes wrongly from this that impartiality is the thematic center of the argument. It is not the center of the argument; rather, it supports the theme that God is righteous in judging Jews who violate his commandments.

⁵ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker exegetical commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1998). 113.

(1) Paul may be referring to faithful Jews and moral Gentiles before the coming of Christ. Living when they did, they would have had no opportunity to respond to the gospel; thus, God regarded their persistence in doing good as a sufficient basis for their salvation.

(2) Paul may be referring to Christians whose works, produced by faith, are taken into account by God in his ultimate salvific verdict.

(3) Paul may be referring to people generally who are saved by their works. His teaching here, then, contradicts his teaching on justification by faith alone elsewhere.

(4) Paul may be referring to people who, without coming to know Christ explicitly, are enabled by God's grace to be saved and so produce works that God approves in the judgment.

(5) Paul may not be referring to anyone in particular. His purpose here is to enunciate the basis on which, outside of Christ, God judges people. Whether anyone actually persists in good works adequately enough to earn salvation Paul simply does not say. His subsequent argument reveals that, in fact, no one can do so (see 3:9, 20).

View (3), positing as it does a contradiction in Paul's teaching, should be set aside and only entertained as a last resort. Not only is it unlikely that Paul would contradict himself on so vital an issue within the same context, but such a contradiction also flies in the face of the truthfulness of Scripture that we think is abundantly attested. View (1) should also be set aside — nothing here suggests that Paul is looking only at the past. View (4) needs to be considered more seriously. Its advocates often insist that God will judge people on the basis of the light that they have received. **But the context of Romans 1 – 3 reveals that only the light of the gospel truly saves. God's grace works through that gospel. So it is unlikely that Paul countenances the idea that people may be saved apart from that gospel here.**

Thus we are left with view (2) — that Paul refers to Gentile Christians — and view (5) — that he simply sets forth the criterion of salvation apart from gospel without implying that anyone meets that criterion. We think the latter is better. It is true that works, produced by faith, are taken into account by God in the judgment (see 2 Cor. 5:10; James 2:14 – 26). But assuming faith as the basis for those works in this context is a big assumption. **Paul has not been talking about faith or about Christians. What he has been talking about is the standard by which God judges all human beings. That standard is works (v. 6).** People who do evil works will suffer wrath. People who persist in doing good will gain eternal life. In both cases, it is the criteria of judgment, not the people who meet that criterion, that Paul has in mind. We must remember that Paul is in the process of building a case. It can be summarized like this:



Salvation for both Jew and Gentile is available only by doing good (2:6, 11, 13)
The power of sin prevents both Jew and Gentile from doing good (3:9 – 19)
Therefore: No one can be saved by doing good (3:20)

To think that in **verses 8 and 10** Paul must be thinking of specific people who gain salvation by works is to miss the point of these verses in the larger argument.

To conclude, then: We do not think these verses give any grounds for thinking that salvation can be gained apart from the gospel. Paul's argument in 1:18 – 3:20 is intended to establish the reason why God has unleashed his saving power in the gospel. Human beings are locked in sin and need to be rescued. For Paul to introduce at this point the possibility of salvation apart from the gospel would undercut his own argument.

What, then, do we say about people who have never had a chance to hear the gospel and either accept or reject it? Are they automatically excluded from salvation because they do not have a chance to hear? This very question was one of my key objections to the gospel when friends of mine in college first confronted me with the claims of Christ. The contemporary pluralistic environment has sharpened the question even further. Influential theologians — some within the evangelical movement — are arguing that people of genuine moral commitment can be saved apart from explicit faith in Christ. Karl Rahner, an influential Roman Catholic theologian, has coined the term “anonymous Christians” to describe such people.

While attractive for many reasons, this view simply does not square with the claims of Scripture. Paul's argument in this part of Romans is straightforward: All people are under sin's power and can escape the wrath that sin brings only by responding in faith to the gospel of God's righteousness in Christ (see 3:9, 20, 21 – 22). To be sure, we cannot always know just how God may reveal his gospel to people. As Paul's own example powerfully demonstrates, the preaching of the gospel by missionaries and others is God's normal means of making his gospel known to people. But we must allow that God may have other ways of revealing his gospel to people that

we do not know or even understand. So, while insisting that only faith in the gospel can save, we perhaps need to be open to different ways by which people may come to know the gospel.

One final point should be made. The problem of those who have not heard takes on a slightly different complexion depending on whether one is a Calvinist or an Arminian. The Arminian, in a sense, has the bigger problem here. For Arminians believe that God's prevenient grace puts all people in the position of being able to respond to the gospel. Their response is, therefore, the crucial factor. Calvinists, by contrast, while insisting on the need for response, also claim that the ultimate cause of salvation lies in God's election, his specific choice of certain persons for salvation. The Calvinist can therefore argue that God will, in his sovereignty, see that every person he has chosen will also be exposed, in one way or another, to the gospel. Having determined the end, God will also enact the means.

I must confess that I am little closer to a compelling answer to my question about those who have not heard than I was when I was first converted. I think Scripture requires that we insist on faith in Christ as the necessary means of salvation. And I trust utterly in the absolute fairness of the God who has revealed himself to me in Jesus Christ. I am content to leave my questions in his hands and hope for clearer resolution in heaven.⁶

Additional explanation

A text that is quite controversial is Romans 2, where Paul speaks of justification by works (2:13) and says that those who do good works will receive eternal life (2:6; cf. 2:7–10, 26–29). How could Paul say that eternal life is according to works when he also maintains in 3:20 that no one is righteous by doing works of law? Moo says that Paul means just what he says. Those who do good works will receive eternal life. But, says Moo, the problem is that no one does the necessary good works. All fall short of perfection, and no one is justified by works of law (3:20). Interpreting what Paul means in Romans 2 is quite difficult, and Moo may be correct in suggesting that the chapter demands perfection for eternal life—a perfection no sinner ever attains. It seems to me, though, and I argue this case in more detail in my own forthcoming commentary, that Rom 2:28–29 reveals that Paul has in mind the good works that are done by the power of the Spirit. The new-covenant work of the Spirit produces good works in believers' lives, and those who do such good works will receive eternal life. No contradiction exists with 3:20 because Paul there excludes good works as a basis for righteousness, but in Romans 2 he says that one will receive eternal life according to one's good works. **The distinction is an important one, for earning or meriting eternal life is excluded—but Paul also teaches that one must be changed in order to receive eternal life on the last day.** The structure of 2:6–11 also supports my interpretation, for Paul threatens those who do evil with judgment and promises eternal life for those who practice what is good. He gives no hint that no one actually does the necessary good works. The parallelism between doing good and evil in vv. 7–10 suggests that some do what is good and receive eternal life, while others do what is evil and face God's wrath. This interpretation also seems preferable because elsewhere Paul teaches that believers who practice evil will not inherit the kingdom (Gal 5:21; 1 Cor 6:9–11)—that is, they will not experience eternal life. Only those who sow to the Spirit will receive eternal life. Those who sow to the flesh will be destroyed (Gal 6:8; cf. Rom 8:13).

If one wanted to describe Moo's position on the law as a whole, it would be accurate to say that he adopts a nuanced Lutheran perspective on the law. That alone makes his commentary distinctive. In terms of the ongoing validity of the law, Moo maintains that the Torah came to an end with the coming of Christ. One period of salvation history ended, and another era began. Believers, therefore, are no longer under the law of Moses in any sense. Moo rejects any attempt to distinguish between the moral segments of the law and other aspects of it. The law is a unity and has passed away with the coming of Christ. It does not follow from this that the Christian is free from all moral norms, according to Moo, for the law of Christ is now the standard of life for believers. Moo rightly discerns the salvation-historical shift between the Testaments—something Cranfield, in my opinion, does not emphasize sufficiently. Moo is also correct in saying that the Mosaic law ended with the coming of Christ. It seems to me, though, that Paul understood the fulfillment of the new covenant (Jer 31:31–34) to involve the keeping of the moral norms of the OT law. To be sure, Paul nowhere explicitly distinguishes between moral norms of the law and the other aspects of the law. But his teaching on the law (see Rom 2:26–29; 8:4; 13:8–10) implies such a distinction. Practically speaking, the distinction between Moo and me on such an issue could be overemphasized, for the content of what we would both put into the law of Christ would be remarkably similar. The interpretation of some verses, however, seems to be affected. He

⁶ Douglas J. Moo, *NIV Application Commentary, New Testament: Romans*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 2000), pp. 80–84.

labors to show that the fulfillment of the law in 8:4 is forensic only, whereas it seems much more likely that Paul is speaking of the actual fulfilling of the law in the everyday lives of Christian believers. It is fulfilled in “those who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” Moo is correct in emphasizing the newness of Paul’s gospel, in which a new era in redemptive history is inaugurated. But it seems to me that Paul understood this newness to involve the keeping of the moral norms of the OT covenant by the power of the Holy Spirit (Ezek 11:18–19; 36:26–27).⁷

2:12-16

Key Point: Just having the law is not enough—one must do it (obey it), even those without the law can do it (at least partially)

2:14-16

Paul’s primary purpose in the paragraph is to indict Jews for transgressing the law and to strip away any salvific value in the mere possession of the law. The Jews believed that they were superior to Gentiles because they possessed the Torah, and thus Paul wants to show in these verses that Gentiles also have heard the law. How do we know that they have heard it? We know this because they sometimes put it into practice, and their conscience smites them when they violate the law written on their hearts and smiles upon them when they keep it. In other words, Paul argues backwards from the occasional doing of the law by the Gentiles to the premise that they must know the law’s moral requirements. But if Gentiles also know the moral requirements of the law, then Jews cannot claim any advantage simply because they possess the Torah. Gentiles have heard “the law” just as the Jews have heard the law, but no Gentile is saved merely by knowing what the law requires. What is needed for righteousness is obedience to the law. Paul’s aim is to say that the same is true of the Jews. Only keeping the law will result in justification on the day of judgment. The interpretation proposed here for verses 14–16 is controversial, and thus I need to defend it in more detail. At this juncture I will simply sketch in with a paraphrase how I understand the structure of the text.

The hearers of the law are not justified (13a—the main point in v. 13).

[Jews who have the gift of the Torah should not think that they are better than Gentiles, who do not possess the Torah.]

For Gentiles possess the law too, even if they lack the written law (14a).

Gentiles show they have the law because they occasionally do what the law commands (14b).

It follows, then, that the law has been written on the heart of Gentiles (15a).

This is confirmed by their consciences, for they feel condemned if they violate moral norms and vindicated when they keep them (15b).

But the mere possession of the law and occasional obedience to its commands does not spare from judgment on the day God judges the secrets of all people through Jesus Christ in accordance with Paul’s gospel (16).⁸

Key Point

Key application: Any self-righteousness we have should be replaced with humility.

About God

He is impartial and just.

A potential discussion may be the “fairness” of God versus the impartiality and justice.

Fairness is relative—it is in the “eye of the beholder”

Justice is based on an absolute standard

⁷ Thomas Schreiner, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society Volume 41* (December 1998) 41:646-647.

⁸ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker exegetical commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1998). 117.

Romans 2:1-16

- 1 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.
- 2 We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who do such things.
- 3 Do you suppose, O man—
you who judge those who do such things
and yet do them yourself—
that you will escape the judgment of God?
- 4 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?
- 5 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.
- 6 He will render to each one according to his works:
7 to those who by patience in well-doing
seek for glory and honor and immortality,
he will give eternal life;
- 8 but for those who are self-seeking
and do not obey the truth,
but obey unrighteousness,
there will be wrath and fury.
- 9 There will be tribulation and distress for every human being
who does evil,
the Jew first and also the Greek,
- 10 but glory and honor and peace
for everyone who does good,
the Jew first and also the Greek.
- 11 For God shows no partiality.

12 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.

13 For it is not the hearers of the law
who are righteous before God,

but the doers of the law who will be justified.

14 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.

15 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

16

on that day when,

according to my gospel,

God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus. (ESV)

Overview—Romans 1:18—3:20

	1:18-32	2:1-16	2:17—3:8	3:9-20
Who is Paul addressing?	Pagan	Moralist	Jew	World (everyone)
How do they relate to God?	Disregard God	Try to distract God	Brag about relationship	No one seeks God
What is their problem?	Knowingly reject God Idolatry / Immorality	Judgmental	Self-righteousness hypocrisy	Sin
Favorite Phrase?	Live it up	Straighten up	You get to work	(Cursing and Bitterness)
Goal?	Satisfy own passions	Monitor their neighbor	Measure their merit	Autonomy
View of Sin?	No one is guilty	They are guilty, not me	Privileged not guilty I'm guilty but privileged overcome	No regard (no fear)
Boundaries?	If it feels good, do it.	If they feel good, note it.	If it feels good, stop it.	None
Paul's Judgment?	You have no excuse for the things you do	You have no authority for the judgments you make	You have no solution for the problem you have	You have no hope in yourself
Key Verse	1:24	2:1	2:23 4:5	3:9-11
Summary	Condemnation: The Universal Need for God's Righteousness			

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	1:18-32	2:1-16	2:17—3:8	3:9-20
Who is Paul addressing?	Pagan			
How do they relate to God?	Disregard God			
What is their problem?	Knowingly reject God Idolatry / Immorality			
Favorite Phrase?	Live it up			
Goal?	Satisfy own passions			
View of Sin?	No one is guilty			
Boundaries?	If it feels good, do it.			
Paul's Judgment?	You have no excuse for the things you do			
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