



International Bible Study Commentary

Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible

L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

Lesson 3

Romans 2:1-12 Commentary New International Version

(Romans 2:1) You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.

In Romans 1, Paul described the morally downward spiral of someone who at one time did and could know God from observation, but who refused to seek God to know and obey God. In Romans 2, Paul described the Jew who judged others according to the Law of God and condemned them while practicing these same evils themselves in violation of God's law. In condemning others, we show that we know the truth and right from wrong; therefore, when we practice the same evil deeds, we bring condemnation upon ourselves by our own wicked words and actions (that are obvious to God and sometimes obvious to others). We have no excuse for our sins because we show we know right from wrong by how we judge others, and we condemn ourselves because we do or have done the same things.

(Romans 2:2) Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth.

The Judge of all the earth will do right and judge rightly. The "truth" in this verse means the nature of reality as created by God with both natural and moral laws that reveal how nature "works" and how people (who God created in His image) should behave according to their nature as created in the image of God. Jesus is the Truth, and God judges according to the truth that Jesus taught and showed. People should behave morally as Jesus behaved. They should love God and others as Jesus loved God and others. Believers in Jesus can do as Jesus did by following Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. When we follow Jesus, we will not follow evil.

(Romans 2:3) So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment?

Francis Schaeffer gave a good illustration regarding these verses. Imagine a tape recorder around your neck that has recorded all your words throughout your lifetime. Then, at God's future judgment, imagine hearing your words condemning others as you stand before God, the Judge of all the earth, and at the same time seeing your actions being projected on a screen for you and all to see. Your words of judgment against others will condemn you as you watch yourself doing what you said was wrong. By your own words and your behavior, you condemn yourself and you will know you deserve God's just judgment, punishment, and wrath. Of course, God can show you these facts about yourself without needing a tape recorder. Our words and actions are stored deeply in our conscience and memory for God to bring to light before our eyes and ears, if necessary, when the time is appropriate at the last judgment. But there is good news!

The good news Paul preached shows the way to escape the just judgment of God! Believe the good news, repent of your sins, turn to Jesus in faith, ask God for His forgiveness, and receive Jesus' death on the cross as God's substitute for the punishment you deserve. Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for those who trust in Him. The good news includes the fact that since Jesus Christ rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, believers love Jesus, obey Jesus, and place their faith in Jesus as their living Lord and Savior. Furthermore, among these many gifts of grace, Jesus also gives His followers the Holy Spirit to help them live for God. Remember, Paul's words in Romans 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." So, believers rejoice in Christ Jesus, their Lord, and they do not fear the judgment of their loving, merciful and just God.

(Romans 2:4) Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

When we practice what we know to be wrong according to our conscience, the Law of God, the moral law, the Scriptures, the commandments of Jesus,

or our words condemning others (all of which reveal the same law—that we are to love God and others), we show how much we despise and disrespect God and care nothing for the fact that He has not yet judged and condemned us for our evil practices. God has not yet condemned us because He wants His kindness, restraint, forbearance (merciful delays in bringing about our just punishment upon us), patience, and love to lead us to Him in repentance and faith. God demonstrated His supreme love for us in sending Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. The love of Christ should lead us to turn to God in repentance and faith, love and praise, in thanksgiving and worship.

(Romans 2:5) But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.

A Day is coming when God will reveal His just judgment on our behavior and His judgment will be righteous and in accordance with truth (reality) and the Truth (Jesus). The Bible says believers can store up treasures in heaven for future blessings, and unbelievers can store up punishment in hell for future sufferings. Wrath means the just, deserved punishment that God will execute on those who have hardened their hearts against all of God’s demonstrations of His love, kindness, delays in deserved punishment, and patience toward them. God will execute just punishment against all who practice evil, who refuse to turn to God in sorrow for their sins, and who refuse to conform their lives to the will of God. Those who harden their hearts, continue doing evil, and remain opposed to all of God’s offers of salvation and eternal fellowship with God have chosen the consequences they deserve and will receive on the day of wrath.

(Romans 2:6) God “will repay each person according to what they have done.”

In Proverbs 24:12, we read — “If you say, ‘But we knew nothing about this,’ does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay everyone according to what they have done?” God’s judgment will be just. God’s judgment will be based on our

practices—deeds that both God and we ourselves have condemned. We have no excuse for our evil practices. The Jews knew the Law of God and the character of our loving and holy God. Knowing the truth is not sufficient for people to escape God’s just retribution if they do not also practice the truth they know. In Romans 1 and 2 Paul showed why we all, both Jews and Gentiles, need to repent of our sins and trust in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

(Romans 2:7) To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.

This verse describes three types of people.

First, true Christians who love and follow Jesus.

Second, Jews who understand the character and Law of God, who persist in doing good works, and who seek glory, honor, and immortality from God; such as Saul, who thought he was rightly serving God by persecuting Christians. When God revealed Jesus Christ to Saul on the road to Damascus, he repented of his sins and trusted in Jesus as his Lord and Savior.

Third, Gentiles who know something about God from nature, from within their own conscience or hearts, and perhaps from the Bible, who then patiently do good in search of God; such as the Roman centurion, Cornelius (see the Book of Acts, chapter 10). Through Peter and with the help of the Holy Spirit, God revealed Jesus Christ to Cornelius, and he repented of his sins and trusted in Jesus as his Lord and Savior. Remember these promises of God in Jeremiah 29:13,14, “When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the Lord.”

In all cases, God receives the glory for anyone’s salvation. By grace, God saves us through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:8, 9, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast.” Our good works show our true desires in seeking God or seeking to serve God; we are not saved by our good works. Immortality can mean seeking to

escape death and live forever. Eternal life can mean the quality of life that we have with God through faith in Jesus Christ, which can begin now and last forever. In John 3:16, we learn: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” To seek glory and honor means to seek the approval of God, whom we seek to find, to know, and to love. In Matthew 6:33, Jesus taught, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

(Romans 2:8) But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.

No matter what they say they believe, no matter what outward show of religiosity they make, whether Jews or Greeks, those who remain unloving, selfish, self-centered, and sinful; who reject and refuse to obey the truths they know about God from the light of nature, from their conscience, from their reason, or from their study of God’s word, will experience God’s just punishment if they reject the truth they know and follow evil. They will receive a judgment that includes God’s just anger or wrath at their refusal to repent despite God’s showing them love, patience, kindness, and many merciful undeserved delays in the just punishment they deserve.

(Romans 2:9) There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile;

The Bible reveals the truth that there are consequences in this life and in the life to come related to our beliefs and behaviors. Some obey unrighteousness because they are fully committed to satisfying themselves supremely. The Bible says such people cannot find peace in this world no matter how much they appear successful and unpunished. There will also be tribulation, trouble, and distress for some after God renders His just judgment and punishment because of the evil they have practiced. Some suffer the natural consequences of their sins in this life, but those who practice evil will also face divine consequences. The Jew who received God’s revelation of the Law of God and God’s character and nature, and the Gentile who received the light of nature and may have also been enlightened by the Bible or by Jesus Christ himself will face God’ just

punishment if they do not turn from doing evil and turn to the Way of salvation—Jesus Christ. No one will have a good excuse before God.

(Romans 2:10) but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

Those who have received the Word of God and the Holy Spirit who indwells those who have repented of their sins and have trusted in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior will love Jesus and do God's will. They will receive a measure of God's glory, honor, and peace in this life, and fully in the life to come. They will receive what they sought as described in Romans 2:7, and many other blessings.

(Romans 2:11) For God does not show favoritism.

As Jesus taught, we reap what we sow. Or, as Paul wrote, we will receive what we seek. We can seek for glory, honor, and immortality by well-doing and receive eternal life by grace through faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. Or, we can seek what satisfies our selfishness, do evil, refuse to repent of our sins, and receive the just judgment of God that we deserve. We can ask people what they are seeking and know the results of their seeking. We can encourage believers to keep serving Christ or encourage unbelievers to repent of their sins and seek Christ as their Lord and Savior.

(Romans 2:12) All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law.

In this verse, Paul anticipated what he would write in Romans 3:22-26, "This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the

one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.” No one has consistently for all their lives lived without sin, whether they knew the Law of God or not. The Gentile who sinned without law and the Jews who sinned under the law will be judged because they sinned and not because they either knew or did not know the Law of God. Whether a person knows the Law of God or not, they still sin; therefore, God sent Jesus Christ into the world to save sinners by first going to the Jews and then to the Gentiles; therefore, anyone who trusts in Jesus can be saved and receive glory, honor, peace, immortality, and eternal life.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. What are some consequences for us when we pass judgment on someone else?
2. On what does God base His just judgments?
3. What are some of the riches God bestows on all people in this life? What is the purpose of God when giving people these riches?
4. How can people store up God’s wrath for themselves in the future?
5. What did Paul say people should seek? How should they seek it? What will they receive?

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Contact: lgp@theiblf.com.