

Romans 2:1-29 Answers Being Jewish Ain't No Excuse

Background: Paul did not start the church in Rome but he was excited about going there to encourage the church, to be encouraged by the church and to preach the gospel to the lost.

Themes: Since Paul had never been to Rome, one of his purposes in writing was to lay out for them the gospel that he preached. Rome had potential to be an important base of support. It was important to be sure that Paul and the Romans were on the same page regarding the gospel.

Overview: Romans has 16 chapters and 5 sections: Sin, Salvation, Sanctification, Sovereignty and Service. Today we continue on in the first section: Sin.

Review:

Based on 1:16-17, how can a person get the God's power for salvation? (*Reread*). It is for everyone who believes. Righteousness comes by faith. It is *sola fide*. Evidence that a person has experienced the power of the gospel for salvation is that he will respond in faith to the truth of the gospel.

Why was salvation to the Jew first and only then to the Greek (1:17)? See John 4:22, Matthew 10:5-6. The only nation on earth God ever made a covenant with was Israel. To them belonged the covenants and the promises. Since Jesus was Jewish, it is right to say that salvation is from the Jews. Chronologically they were the first to hear the gospel. As we shall see, this order (Jew first, then Greek) is of immense importance as we progress through the sin section.

ESV John 4:22 . . . salvation is from the Jews.

ESV Matthew 10:5-6 These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

What is it that we need salvation from (1:18)? We need salvation from the wrath of God against ungodliness and unrighteousness.

ESV John 3:36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

Righteousness and Wrath: According to 1:17, the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel. According to 1:18, the wrath of God is also revealed from heaven. Every person will ultimately experience one or the other.

What root sin triggered God's wrath (1:18-32)? The sin of suppressing the truth about God brought on His wrath.

Romans 1:18-32 makes it clear that our ancestors suppressed the truth about God can went off into idolatry. It started back when Adam and Eve were alive, it was going on when Paul wrote and it is still happening today. The verbs in 1:18-20 are in the present tense; it is an on-going suppression. Because of that, God gave them up to impurity, to degraded passions, to debased minds.

According to 1:18-32, exactly how does God reveal his wrath against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men? God's wrath is evident in the fact He gave men over (1:24, 26, 28) to impurity, to dishonorable passions and to a debased mind. In Adam we are all caught up in this net. Disobedience to parents and gossip is in the same list as murder and hating God.

The Point: In general, people suppress the truth about God (both Greek and Jew), becoming increasingly sinful.

**** Now, in this next paragraph, Paul focuses attention a new group of sinners: **Who else stands condemned and without excuse (2:1-5)?** Even those who condemn the sins detailed in Romans 1 are under God's judgment. As will become evident in the following verses, Paul had Jewish judges in his sights.

What problem was detailed in 2:1? The judges were practicing the very same things they condemned. They were hypocrites.

1. In 2:1, what is the therefore there for? It links 2:1-5 back into the content of chapter 1. Those who judged agreed that the people in Romans 1 had no excuse (1:20). The problem is that the judges committed some of the same sins. Therefore, the judges themselves were also without excuse (2:1).

2. Based on 2:2, with what did both Paul and the judges agree? They agreed that everyone who practices such things deserves death.

ESV Romans 6:23 . . . the wages of sin is death . . .

Application: If you practice these things God's wrath is upon you. Our physical death is preliminary to something far worse: spiritual death.

What is the answer to the question in 2:3? They did in fact suppose they would escape judgment despite the fact they committed the same sins.

3. What is this question designed to do (2:3)? It is designed to point out the certainty of their coming judgment. They were as liable to condemnation as the people described in chapter 1.

Based on 2:4, why had God shown kindness, forbearance and patience to these people? It was meant to lead them to repentance. They mistakenly thought it was because they were exempt.

Word Study: “Patience” (2:4) is from *makrothumia*; *makro* means long and *thumia* has to do with heat; thus a long time to get hot. The lexicon has “slowness in avenging wrongs; self-restraint which does not hastily retaliate a wrong. It is the opposite of wrath or revenge” (Thayer #3115). Vine agrees: it is a suspension of wrath.

What is repentance (2:4)? It is from *metanoia*; *meta* means change and *noeo* means “thinking”; thus, a change of thinking that leads to a change of action. Thayer said it is “that change of mind by which we turn from, desist from; it embraces both a recognition of sin, sorrow for it and hearty amendment” (#3341).

4. What statement was being made through the question of 2:4? The question effectively made the point that these judges did indeed presume on God’s forbearance and they did not realize that God’s kindness toward them was designed to lead them to repentance (as opposed to continuing on in sin thinking they were exempt from judgment).

According to 2:5, what are hypocritical judges storing up for themselves? Just like those who suppress the truth (1:17), they are storing up wrath and judgment from God. This is the opposite of what Jesus said to do:

ESV **Matthew 6:20** . . . lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven . . .

5. According to 2:5, why were these men liable to God’s wrath? It was because of their hard and impenitent hearts.

**** **What two groups are liable to both wrath and eternal life (2:6-11)?** Both Jew and Greek are liable. Just as salvation came first to the Jews (1:16), so too judgment will come first to the Jews (2:9). Simply being Jewish ain’t no excuse; in fact it brings greater condemnation.

6. Based on 2:6-11, on what will God’s judgment be based? Compare John 5:28-29, Revelation 20:11-15. It appears to be based on works. Those who persist in well-doing will get eternal life and those who do not obey will get wrath and fury. Similarly, Jesus said:

ESV **John 5:28-29** Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

Elsewhere the Bible records there are books containing the record of people’s actions:

ESV Revelation 20:11-12 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it . . . And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened . . . And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.

7. How is 2:6-11 compatible with 1:16-17? Compare 1:16-17, Galatians 2:21, Revelation 20:12-15. Remember that Paul's purpose in writing here was to convince the hypocritical judges that they too were without excuse and liable to God's wrath. It is the doers of the law, not the hearers only, who will be justified. The rest of the story is that no one will be declared right with God by good works since it just takes one sin to disqualify us. It is possible Paul is speaking hypothetically here. It is also possible that he is using good works as the evidence of a true saving faith.

ESV Galatians 2:21 . . . if justification were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

ESV James 2:17 . . . faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

ESV James 2:26 . . . as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

In addition to the books containing a record of people's works, there is also a book of life:

ESV Revelation 20:12-15 . . . Then another book was opened, which is the book of life . . . And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Those whose names are in the Lamb's book of life have eternal life by faith and while on this earth will by patience in well-doing seek glory and honor and immortality (2:6). A changed life is evidence one's name is in the book of life.

What truth about God did Paul state in 2:11? (Reread).

Word Study: "Partiality" (2:11) is from *prosopolempsia*; it the Greek word for face coupled with the word for receive. It means to receive (accept) someone based on face value, to base judgment on outward circumstances and not intrinsic merit. It is to judge a book according to its cover. For example, a partial judge is favorable toward someone who is wealthy, high-born or powerful (Thayer #4382).

8. Why did Paul bring out the truth that God shows no partiality (2:11)? Because the Jews thought God was partial to them!

ESV Acts 10:34-25 . . . Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him."

9. What do you think the overall point of this paragraph is (2:6-11)? I think the overall point is that God shows no partiality: both Jew and Greek will be judged (2:11). Some Jews evidently thought they would escape judgment simply because they were Jewish.

******By what two standards will sinners be judged (2:12-16)?** Those who sin without the law will be judged by their conscience. Those who sin under the law will be judged by the law.

ESV James 4:17 . . . whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

What law did Paul obvious mean (2:12)? This is a reference to the law of Moses given at Mt. Sinai to Israel.

Who are those without the law and who are those under the law (2:12)? Those without the law (*anomos*) were the Gentiles (the Greeks) and those under the law (*en nomos*) were the Jews.

Based on the context, how could sin be defined (2:12-16)? Sin is violating God's law. The Greek word for sinned (2:12) is *harmartano*, "to miss the mark, to err, to be mistaken, to violate God's law" (Thayer #264). In classical Greek *harmartia* was used for missing a target or taking a wrong road. In the New Testament it is a violation of what God's glory demands (NBD, p. 1117).

ESV Romans 3:23 . . . all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God . . .

What important truth did Paul reinforce in 2:13?

Note: Verse 13 seems to be the point of the paragraph (2:12-16).

10. Why do you suppose Paul made this point about only doers of the law being justified (2:13)? Evidently it was common for Jews to think they would be justified simply because they knew the law (whether they obeyed it or not).

11. What can we learn about Gentiles from 2:14-15? Some gentiles have God's law (the same basic morality as was given as Sinai) written on their hearts (conscience). This is the same law revealed two different ways (NBD, p. 686).

Note: Paul did not intend to imply that salvation is by works. For example, many commentators (including Ambrosiaster, Augustine and Barth) feel like this is referring to Gentile Christians who have the law written on their hearts (Cranfield, p. 156). If so, this would be the law of Christ (Jeremiah 31:33).

Based on 2:16, what is an integral part of the gospel? Paul's gospel included the fact of a day of judgment by God through Jesus. We will all stand before God in judgment for our actions.

12. What is the overall point of this paragraph (2:12-16)? The point seems to be that both Jew and Gentile will face God's judgment, and only the "doers" of the law will be justified (it is not enough merely to have the law). Cranfield says "the main point made in this paragraph is that knowledge of the law does not in itself constitute any defense against the judgment of God" (p. 153).

*****What impact did Jewish hypocrisy have on God's reputation (2:17-24)?** Because of their hypocrisy, the reputation of the God of the Hebrews was ruined (blasphemed, 2:23-24). The first century hypocrisy of the Jews might explain some of the rabid anti-Semitism by the Romans toward the Jews.

13. In 2:17-22 is a series of four questions. What are these questions designed to accomplish? (Reread 2:17-22). They are designed to point out Jewish hypocrisy. They taught Gentile proselytes, but not themselves. They preached against stealing but they stole. They said not to commit adultery but they committed adultery. They condemned idolatry while secretly robbing temples.

What implication is there in Paul's statement, "you call yourself a Jew" (2:17)? The implication is that they were not *really* Jewish (in the sense that Jewishness really mattered).

Based on 2:17-22, how did some Jewish people view Gentiles? Those with the Law saw those without it as blind, in darkness, foolish and children (which they may have been!).

Based on 2:20, how did these Jewish judges view the law? They saw the law as the embodiment of knowledge of truth.

ESV Romans 7:12 . . . the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

In the ancient world, being Jewish had great advantage spiritually over being Gentile because of God's covenant with Israel at Mt. Sinai.

ESV Romans 3:1-2 Then what advantage has the Jew? . . . Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.

ESV Romans 9:4-5 . . . to them [the Israelites] belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever.

According to 2:23, how did the Jews dishonor God? They dishonored God by breaking the very law in which they boasted.

14. What terrible impact did the Jews have on the Gentiles, according to 2:23-24?
Contrast with Exodus 19:5-6. They caused the Gentiles to blaspheme the God of the Jews.

Word Study: “Blasphemed” (2:24) is from *blasphemeo*, the root of which means to slander. It is to speak lightly or profanely of sacred things. (Thayer #987). The NASV in other places translates it as “dishonored, hurling abuse, malign, revile, spoken against, spoken as evil”.

What a failure this was considering God’s original purpose for them:

ESV Exodus 19:5-6 . . . if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples . . . and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

15. Why did Paul bring Isaiah 52:5 to bear in 2:24? Paul applied Isaiah 52:5 against them.

Historically, the Jews had broken God’s law given at Sinai so badly that God exiled them from the Promised Land (for example in the Assyrian invasion and then the Babylonian invasion). Paul seemed to judge that the Jews of his day were as disobedient as those in Isaiah’s day (Isaiah wrote just before the Babylonian Exile). When Paul wrote, Judea was under Roman occupation and in A.D. 70 the Romans drove them from the Promised Land.

******What is it that makes for true Jewishness (2:25-29)?** True Jewishness is not a matter of ethnic birth or outward circumcision or merely having the law but also of spiritual birth, an inward circumcision of the heart and obedience to the spirit of the law.

Some Jewish judges thought they were exempt from judgment simply because **1)** they knew the law (even though they did not practice it) and **2)** they felt exempt was due to their circumcision.

Application: The Christian version of this error is when people think they are exempt from God’s wrath because they were born into a Christian nation or a Christian family, or because they are church members, or because they walked the isle when they were ten, or because they have been baptized.

16. What was the historical relationship between Jews and circumcision (2:25-29)? See Genesis 12, 15, 17. God made a covenant with Abraham, promising him land, descendants and blessing. The sign of this covenant was male circumcision. Thus, all covenant descendants of Abraham were circumcised shortly after birth.

The problem is that people began thinking they were right with God simply because they were descendants of Abraham and had been circumcised.

Based on 2:25, from a Jewish perspective, when is circumcision of value? Circumcision is of value when a Jew obeys the Law, otherwise circumcision becomes uncircumcision.

17. Paul declared circumcision to be of value if one obeyed the law (2:25). In what sense was it of value? See ahead to 3:1-2. It had value because historically the Jews had been entrusted with the oracles of God and more so than any people on earth the Jews were in a position to know the true God. For 2,000 years, from Abraham to Jesus, if a person wanted to find the truth about God, he had to go through the gate of Judaism.

What is the answer to the question in 2:26? The obvious answer is yes. Between the two, keeping the law was far more important than being circumcised.

18. What was Paul's point in asking this question (2:26)? His point was to impress upon hypocritical Jews that Gentiles who kept the law were more acceptable to God than a Jew who did not keep it. Some Jews had the written code but broke it. Some Gentiles had the law in their hearts and kept it (Gentiles who believed in Jesus).

19. What application to the truth of 2:26 did Paul make in 2:27? Compare back to 2:1.

Since the uncircumcised who are obedient will be regarded as circumcised, it they who will judge the circumcised who are disobedient. The Jews were in the habit of judging the Gentiles, but in an upset Paul declared the Gentiles would be judging the Jews! The bottom rail will be on top!

20. What disturbing truth about Jewishness did Paul state in 2:28-29? The disturbing truth is that no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly. That is, people physically descended from Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph (ethnic Jews), who are only circumcised outwardly but not inwardly, who do not obey the law, are not really Jews ("no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly").

ESV **Deuteronomy 10:16** Circumcise . . . the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.

ESV **1 Samuel 16:7** . . . the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.

True Jews are physical descendants of Abraham who are also spiritual descendants of Abraham (Paul develops this more later in Romans) by faith in Jesus the Messiah.

A Bridge Too Far: Paul is not here saying that obedient Gentiles are spiritual Jews. He is merely defining what true Jewishness is in God's sight. Spiritual Gentiles are not spiritual Jews. In Christ the two (Jew, Gentile) are one new man.

So What?

21. What was Paul seeking to accomplish in writing Romans 2? Paul's objective seems to have been to prove that the Jewish man is no exception to God's judgment. Like the Gentile, the Jew is without excuse.

22. How can we use Romans 2 in our presentations of the gospel?

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. Doing so will cause focus.

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