

Romans 2:1-16: A Wake-Up Call for Religious People

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Romans / Romans 2:1–16

Introduction

- https://www.huffpost.com/entry/minnesota-state-fair-dairy-princesses-immortalized-with-butter_n_68a89052e4b037ca0b430fc8 - In a sculptor's hands - a block of butter can be transformed into a work of art.
- In your life - a dead heart, hard as stone, can be transformed into a heart full of life by as God, the Master Sculptor, does a work inside of you.
- What's the evidence of transformation in your life? What's the evidence that God has been sculpting and forming your heart to make you more like Jesus?
- [Romans 2](#) show us what doesn't shape a heart like His... empty religion - simply claiming God, attending religious services, saying religious things, and doing religious things without actually repenting of your sins and following Christ by faith.
- [Romans 2](#) is a wake-up call for religious people - for people who know the right things to say, who on the outside appear to have their act together, but on the inside are cold to God's work.
- Listen carefully because [Romans 2](#) could describe you. Three truths that serve as a wake-up call for religious people.

No one can take the moral high ground.

- Paul giving us the bad news before the Good News - [Romans 1](#) = the whole world under the wrath of God. [Romans 2](#) = Religious Jews who think they're safe because of their religious heritage are under the wrath of God too.
- Paul calls out people from a Jewish background depending on their religious heritage as evidence of their righteousness. Paul calls out people who are religiously elite who would agree with Paul while ignoring their own heart issues.
- vs. 1-3: Paul knows that some in his audience had a judgmental heart. They would say, "That's right Paul. Those sexually immoral people, those people who are arrogant, boastful, prideful, etc. are guilty."
- Paul calls out those depending on their religious heritage. They weren't any better than the pagan who openly defied God. Because while the religious looked like they had their act together, Paul knew that on the inside they were lifeless. They were no different than the pagan. They judged others not realizing that they were under the judgment of God.
- Think Sermon on the Mount: "You shall not commit murder, but if you harbor anger, you're guilty. You shall not commit adultery, but if you lust, you're an adulterer." You might THINK you're better than others because outwardly you look like a good, moral person. However, internally, your heart is a wreck. You are far from God. Based on the sermon on the mount, we're all under the judgment of God no matter how clean our lives look on the outside.
- vs. 4 - "Do you despise the riches of His kindness?" Religious Jews who had been exposed to the truth about God - a privileged people - they had the Law and the Prophets pointing them to the truth, but they had not experienced the transforming power of the Gospel.

- God had been kind and patient - The advantage of being God's covenant people yet they had not repented. God's kindness intended to show them their need for a Savior yet they missed it.
- Vs. 5 - Storing up wrath for themselves because of a failure to trust God by faith.
- You can't take the moral high ground and say, "I'm better than..." The truth about you is that you're not, you're just better at hiding it. Being religious doesn't make you better than someone else, but it may make it harder for you to see your need for a Savior because of your holier than thou attitude.
- What characterizes people who trust religious heritage more than they actually trust God's Word?
 - **Constant comparison** - "I'm better than... I'm not like... etc."
 - **Selective outrage** - Outraged at the sins we find despicable but not outraged at our own sins (our own pride, judgmentalism, arrogance, etc.)
 - **Tribalism** - Us vs. Them - Republican vs. democrat, see ourselves at war with the other side instead of offering the hope of the Gospel.
 - **Traditionalism** - Faith is more defined by the traditions we keep than God's present work in our lives.
 - **Truth as a weapon** - Quote scripture to win an argument rather than to point people to the love of Jesus. More concerned about being right than being compassionate.
 - **Presumption** - Presume on God's grace - "I'm ok because I live a good life, I'm a good person, I attend church, etc." While your heart is self-seeking, self-serving, and self-righteous. Not worried about repentance because you believe your performance is good enough.

- Be careful - you may be a religious but not actually a follower of Jesus. Paul reminds us that you can see the evidence of a follower of Jesus in the next section.
- How many people have we pushed away from God because we put trusted our religious heritage more than God Himself?

No one can change God's standard of judgement.

- Why would we claim God/religion without actually submitting to God's rule over our lives? We want heaven without God - all the benefits of being a Christian while at the same time living according to our own will.
- BUT - you can't change God's standard of judgment.
- vs. 6-7 He will repay each one according to his works ([Psalm 62:12](#)) - A common Jewish teaching - Every good Jew knew this. Every person who persists in doing good for the glory of God will inherit eternal life, but those who persist in disobedience will receive judgment (vs. 8-9). Judgment for those who persist in evil, glory for those who persist in good.
- vs. 11 - There is no favoritism with God. Jews didn't get a free pass because they were God's chosen people - and you don't get a free pass because you came from the right family, grew up in the church, went to Sunday School, etc.
- Paul is NOT saying that anyone can earn eternal life by doing good. He's showing us the standard that NO ONE can meet but Christ.
- We will all stand before God. When you do, will your works stand up before God? Will your works justify you?

- I ask the question often when I share the Gospel, “If you were to die, do you think you would go to heaven?” People often answer, “I hope so/I think so.” Why? “I’ve been a good person.”
- If you stand before a holy God on the basis of your goodness, do you really think you’ve been good enough? How do you know if you’ve been good enough? Reality: Only one good enough to earn eternal life, and it wasn’t you - it was Jesus. He was perfect. He met all of God’s requirements to earn eternal life.
- You’re not Jesus. If you stand before God on the day of judgment and your eternal fate is determined by your good works, you will be condemned because your rebellion against God far outweighs your good work. Your lack of submission to His Word, your unwillingness to repent, and your refusal to live your life according to His will is more than enough to damn you to hell forever.
- God’s standard is not up for debate - and you can’t change it. God’s standard isn’t better than average. God’s standard is perfection - and only ONE has achieved perfection: Jesus Christ. Jesus lived perfectly for you, died in your place, and rose again so you could have the gift of salvation.
- **Religion will never save you.** You’re presence this morning is not impressive to God. Your works are not impressive to God. Your spiritual heritage is not impressive to God.
- **Religion will make you judgmental, prideful, and bitter.** Empty religion - outward devotion without inward surrender - breed judgement and pride. Truth faith in Jesus produces humility and compassion.
- **Jesus will save you and give you a new heart.** What is impressive to God is faith - embracing the Gospel message that Jesus is the only way to salvation. Jesus will give you eternal life and give you compassion for those who do not belong to Him.

- In Christ, we PURSUE good works NOT to be saved but because we are saved and because we want to honor Him.

No one can be righteous by mere exposure to the truth.

- Just because the Gentiles didn't have the Law didn't mean they had an excuse for their disobedience, and just because the Jews did have the Law didn't mean they got a free pass.
- While the Gentiles did not have the first five books of the Old Testament - the moral law is written on the hearts of all of humanity. Gentiles a law unto themselves (vs. 14). Even those who never hold a Bible still know the difference between right and wrong. The moral law is written on every heart. Conscience whispers what Scripture declares—murder, lying, adultery, dishonoring parents are wrong. That's why ignorance isn't innocence.
- And... just because the Jews did have the Law didn't mean that they were faithful to the Law. vs. 13 - hearers of the law are not righteous before God. Doers of the Law are. Hearing the Law is a good thing - [Deuteronomy 6:4](#) - but hearing does not equal faith. Hearing God's standards does not justify someone.
- When Paul says 'doers of the law are justified,' he's describing God's perfect standard—not a realistic path to salvation. If anyone could perfectly obey, they'd be righteous—but no one does. That's why we need Christ.
- Abraham, Moses, etc. justified because they had faith in God and they lived out their faith.
- vs. 16 - Ultimately, God knows the heart. Nothing is hidden from Him. He knows the real you. For those who cling to religion instead of Jesus, it will be painful on the day of judgment when those hidden

sins or that hidden rebellion is revealed. What you thought you were getting away with will ultimately damn you.

- The same Jesus who will judge the secrets of men (v.16) is also the One who offers mercy for repentant hearts. You can't hide from Him—but you can run to Him.
- **Familiarity with God's Word is not the same as faithfulness to God's Word.** You've heard the Bible stories, you've sat through numerous sermons. You can quote [John 3:16](#), but that doesn't mean your faithful to what the Scripture actually teaches. Are you familiar or faithful? Faith in Christ transforms you into someone who desires faithfulness more than familiarity.
- **God judges by your faith not your exposure.** So what is it for you? You've been exposed to religion, to church, to the things of God, but have you embraced the Gospel by faith? Have you repented of your sins and given your life to the One who gave His life for you? You've been exposed to truth—but have you embraced it? Familiarity isn't faith. Religion can make you look polished on the outside, but only Jesus can make you new on the inside. Run to Him today—the One who judges the secrets of the heart is also the Savior who died to forgive it.