

Week Three: (Romans 2:1-16)

Key Verse

“For there is no favoritism with God.” - Romans 2:11 (CSB)

Key Principles

- **We are all equally guilty in God’s eyes and God’s judgment is righteous.**
- **The law did not produce righteousness in the Israelites.**
- **God has provided one way of salvation that unites diverse peoples.**

Before we dive in, it’s worth noting that the word “law” can refer to multiple things in the book of Romans. First, law may refer to the entire Old Testament, as in Romans 3:19, where Paul quotes from the Psalms and Prophets. Second, Law with a capital “L” may refer to the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament (see Luke 24:44). Finally, law may refer to the Sinai covenant found within the Pentateuch (see Galatians 3:17).

In earlier lessons, we began looking at three themes that will keep coming up in these early chapters of Romans, themes which will also set a tone for the rest of what Paul wants to accomplish in Romans as a whole. Those three themes are...

- **Humankind’s equality,**
- **God’s judgment, and**
- **The difference between righteousness and unrighteousness.**

In Romans 2:1–16, Paul adds new insight to what he has already taught on these topics. He does so most pointedly in verse 11, with a bold statement that “there is no favoritism with God.” This statement is actually a summary of a profound truth from Deuteronomy 10:17 and Job 34:19, where the Old Testament goes into detail about how God does not favor some—such as those with wealth or status—over others. We are all equal in God’s eyes.

We cannot understand the gospel, and the rest of what Paul will be writing about in Romans, until we let this concept sink in. God shows no partiality. What does this mean? From God’s perspective, there is nothing that we can bring to him on our own, or brag about with our own words, that will ever make him change his mind about us. This is both good news and bad news.

God’s lack of favoritism begins as bad news in these early chapters of Romans. As we have seen in Romans 1:18–32, all people are unrighteous, and God looks upon unrighteous people as deserving of his wrath and judgment. It does not matter what station or job we are in, how much status or influence we have, what color our skin is, or even how rich or talented we may be. None of these things impress God. None of these things can fix our unrighteousness before a righteous God. God sees right through the surface, examining the core of who we are to determine whether or not we have truly chosen life in his name (see Deuteronomy 30:15–20).

But this same attribute—God’s lack of favoritism or impartiality—becomes good news for us in the gospel. Since we could never earn our standing before God on our own, God decided to give us righteousness as a gift, by his grace, and through faith in Jesus. And this gift is given to all people, regardless of status, merit, or ethnicity.

Paul will describe this more in the chapters to come, but he mentions God’s impartiality here in order to convince Jews and Gentiles (or “Greeks”; Paul uses these words interchangeably) that they must be unified in the gospel. Paul shows that they are all under condemnation; therefore,

both groups must acknowledge their own sinfulness without boasting. The gospel is the only thing that could truly succeed in unifying them.

This message holds true today, just as it did back then. No matter what ethnicity, social class, or country we are from, all of us are under God's wrath. But consider what our world would look like if the gospel message unified believers of all different ethnicities, socio-economic backgrounds, and political parties. Paul was writing to the Romans, but this truth is as powerful and life-changing today as it was when Paul first wrote those powerful words, "For there is no favoritism with God" (2:11).

Romans 2:1–16 presents two more points about God's judgment. First, God's judgment is right, true, and warranted (2:2). Second, God's judgment is active. God is storing up judgment for those who persist in unrighteousness and continue walking in sin. Jesus took all of God's wrath for the sin of those who put their faith in him on the cross, so that leaves God's wrath to be poured out only on those who deny his Son. This is a warning to us. God's judgment is not just in the past, when Christ took our judgment upon himself on the cross; it's coming in the future when Jesus returns (2 Corinthians 5:10). We have to be clear with our friends and neighbors: Judgment from an impartial judge is coming.

These points about unrighteousness and God's judgment are a vital aspect of the message of the gospel, and Romans 1–3 only gives us part of the full picture. As Paul will show us, for God to save unrighteous people, he would have to bring a righteousness to us that does not come from us. We'll read more about this, and who and where this righteousness comes from, later in Romans. But for now, it is enough for us to wrestle with the reality that our God is a righteous judge, and we are not.

Study Guide

1. What do we learn about God's judgment from Romans 2:1–16? How does this compare to what we learned about God's judgment in Romans 1:18–32? How do people "suppress the truth" (1:18) of God by what they do and what they do not do?
2. What does this passage teach about humankind's equality before God? What standard does the passage say God uses to judge everyone, both Jews and Gentiles? What does it mean to be "without excuse" (1:20) and why is this important for how anyone understands the gospel?
3. What contrasts and comparisons do you notice in this passage? What differences do you see in this passage between righteousness and unrighteousness?
4. Summarize this passage in your own words. What themes are common in the answers provided by the members of your small group?

Respond in Prayer

In Romans 1–3, Paul references specific psalms in order to grow our understanding of God's righteousness. Each week of this Study Guide will include a recommended psalm that helps us focus on the righteousness of our great God. Set aside some time this week to read through the selected psalm and use the prayer prompts below as your guide. We recommend praying through this psalm on your own at home and together with your small group. And for those looking for more passages to pray, feel free to return to Romans 1–3 and pray through those passages as well.

This Week's Prayer Passage: Psalm 36

Read Psalm 36.

Pray through the following prompts, according to the A.C.T.S. method.

- **Adoration:** Give God praise for these characteristics that you see in Psalm 36.
- **Confession:** Ask God for forgiveness for the ways we have conspired to do evil with transgressors (36:1). Ask for forgiveness for the ways that you have harbored sin in your life, thinking that you would not be found out (36:2). Confess to God where you have been self-seeking and ask for a change of heart in these areas.
- **Thanksgiving:** Thank God that we can take refuge in his shadow (36:7). Thank God that he has let you drink from the fountain of life and shined his light on you (36:9). Thank God that feasting on him is the only sustenance that we truly need (36:8)
- **Supplication:** Ask the Lord to help you see his steadfast love as greater than anything else in your life. Ask him to keep you from arrogance and to give you a discerning spirit, to know when to run from evil and to run straight toward his fountain of life.