



Relentless Grace: How the Gospel Changes Everything

Paul's Letter to the Romans

Session 3 – The Gospel vs. Hypocrisy | Romans Chapter 2

If we could go back in time and visit the church in Rome, who would we be sitting with? There would be families and young adults, widows, and aging parents. Some worked a trade (Aquila and Priscilla were tentmakers) or in the marketplace but most would have been house slaves and manual laborers. Many were devout Jews and probably more were converted Gentiles.

The church was a network of home fellowships (at least five according to Romans 16) scattered throughout the city. From what Paul mentions in his letter, they dealt with issues that naturally come up when people with differing backgrounds and strong opinions do life together. These faithful believers were known for proclaiming the gospel—and when a church has that kind of influence on the world, the enemy takes notice and stirs trouble wherever he can. So in this chapter, Paul explicitly calls out an attitude that he could personally speak of from past experience. Religious snobbery, he warns, is not something that God will overlook.

Icebreaker (Choose one.)

Growing up, did you go to church regularly? Why, or why not?

Before you accepted the Lord, describe your opinion of Christians and what it was based on.

Goals for this Session:

- Discover why sharing the gospel means practicing what we preach.
- Consider the difference between pleasing God or simply doing business with Him.
- Pray honest prayers that frequently express gratitude and freely extend grace.

Who, Me?

Romans 2:1–16

Paul dismisses the notion of any double-standard with God.

1. What reason does Paul give for rebuking those who pass judgment on others?

- a. When, and in what way, is it right to judge?

- b. When, and in what way, is it wrong to judge?

2. Paul didn't need to be in the same room to know that some who had agreed with his remarks in the first chapter weren't saying "amen" now. *Who does he think he's talking to?* It turns out that Paul was aiming at *self-righteous* people too.

- a. Keep in mind that Paul is talking to a group who would identify as clean living, morally upright people. What did Paul want them to understand?

In what way do Paul's comments line up with what Jesus taught?

Luke 18:9–14

Mark 7:5–9

- b. It's easy to think that being a Christian and knowing what the Bible says qualifies us to identify and correctly analyze sin in other people. We can quickly spot sin in someone else but tend to excuse or avoid our own.

When you're in a position to exhort someone about sin, how do you usually go about it?

When you need to be exhorted about sin, how do you usually receive it?

Good to Know

I'm talking to you . . .

If the "they" Paul spoke about in chapter one is the world apart from God, who is this "you" he turns to rebuke in chapter two? Was Paul talking to a specific individual? Not likely.

Paul is using a style of argument (diatribe) so his readers can "listen in" while he exposes and corrects the wrong assumptions of any self-righteous person—in this case, the one who assumes that being a good Jew is what makes them righteous.

#wordstoknow

Greek words/terms at a glance.

"judge" (krinó) To form an opinion about someone or something; in this case, an unfavorable one.

"condemn" (katakrinó) To declare guilt and inflict penalty; to doom.

"Gentile"/"Greeks" Anyone not a descendent of Abraham (Jewish).

"justified" When the penalty for a crime was paid, the guilty person would be "justified"; declared free from condemnation.

Evaluating right from wrong is part of being faithful to God’s Word. If we are unwilling to ever speak up or be spoken to about sin, we’re like those in Romans 1:32 giving tacit approval of sin. That being said, calling out sin is one thing—but condemning someone is another.

3. Paul reminds his readers that it’s God’s kindness (goodness) that leads us to repentance. What does that mean? Consider the following verses for help with your answer.

Psalm 145:17–19

Titus 3:4–7

Do your best to describe, from your own experience, how God’s kindness and goodness leads us to repentance.

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, let it sink in and make it part of your prayers. Ask the Holy Spirit to examine your heart and increase your understanding.

“Do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering,
not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?”

Romans 2:4 NKJV

Think About It . . .

Look up. What does this verse teach you about God?

Look around. What does this indicate about the world and people in general?

Look within. What does this teach you about yourself?

Look ahead. Does this verse give you a reason to hope? In what way?

Look alive! Given the opportunity, how would you express the truth in this verse to someone who needs to hear it?

Planks and Prodigals

Romans 2:17–29

Paul speaks directly to his Jewish brothers with a challenge to practice what they preach.

1. Paul understood what Jewish and Gentile believers faced as they tried to live together in Christian harmony. How does he describe the common Jewish mindset in verses 17–20?
 - a. The advantage of a Jewish upbringing gave these believers an edge in knowing Scripture (having heard it all their life) and the confidence that came with their heritage of being chosen and loved by God (see Deuteronomy 7:6–8). But by his questions in verses 21–24, Paul also points out a common hazard of being raised Jewish. What was it?
 - b. In your estimation, what are some advantages of being brought up in a Christian home? What are the potential hazards?
 - c. If you are (or plan someday to be) a parent, what would you say is the most effective thing you can do to raise your children in the Lord? Make your answer practical and specific.

2. Wherever Paul preached the gospel, he got pushback from Jewish legalists who believed putting Jews and Gentiles on equal footing diluted their religion.* Paul rebuked them for priding themselves on being keepers (guardians) of the Law even though they weren't being keepers (obedient) of the Law. Is there a lesson here for us?

“This year, or this month, or more likely this very day, we have failed to practice the kind of behavior we expect from other people.”

C. S. Lewis

 - a. **Planks** – In Matthew 7:1–5, Jesus warns that the way we measure others is the same measuring stick God will use with us. Pharisees were chronic nitpickers who added rules upon rules (read Matthew 23 for goodness sake) and kept a critical eye on everybody else. If you could identify something (maybe an opinion or expectation) that has the potential to become a plank for you, what would it be? What would remove it?

* See Acts 13:38–50 and Acts 15:1–12 for example; and even in Rome (Acts 28:11–29) a few years after Paul wrote this letter.

- b. **Prodigals** – This familiar story that Jesus told is a favorite (see Luke 15:11–32). We focus on the younger son’s trail of poor choices and bad habits that led to ruin and heartache. What about the older brother? He stayed home, did the chores, worked the field. He was the “good” son, but was he any closer to his father? Think about it.

When his father comes looking for him also, there is no hint of gratitude or love in his response. “All these years I’ve *served* you, I *never* disobeyed your command, yet you *never* gave me...” Who speaks that way unless they’ve been earning and keeping score? Was he devoted to pleasing his father, or was he simply doing business with him? The elder son thought he was doing all the right things but he scorned his brother and refused the feast that his father prepared.

“*But I’m a good person.*” If someone asked you why being a good person is not enough, how would you explain it? Use the verses below for help ...

Matthew 7:21

Romans 3:10, 23

Ephesians 2:8–9

... but answer in your own words.

It’s been said that no one is too bad to be saved, but many will think themselves too good. This was the issue that Paul addressed with his Jewish brothers and sisters.

3. *How the gospel changes everything.* The two sons in Jesus’ parable are like the people Paul describes in Romans 1 and 2. To some degree, we have all been one or the other—or both—at some point in our lives. When we remember that who we are and what we’ve been given is a gift from God (see 1 Corinthians 4:7), the power of the gospel is good news all over again.
- a. The gospel is incentive to live a grateful life. According to Hebrews 12:28, a grateful heart is what makes our worship and service acceptable to God. Does gratitude come easily for you? Why or why not?
- b. The gospel is incentive to live an authentic life. Jesus warned the Pharisees to first wash the inside of the cup and then the outside will also be clean (Matthew 23:26). Does self-examination and repentance come easily for you? Why or why not?



Gospel at a Glance: Circumcision of the Heart | Circumcision was God’s appointed “sign of the covenant” (Genesis 17:1–2, 11) made with Abraham. God considered Abraham righteous because of his *believing faith* in the Lord’s promise (see Genesis 15:6) and circumcision was merely the outward, physical mark of belonging to Him. Over time, the significance of circumcision was lost on generations of Jews who thought it identified them as being righteous by birth and guaranteed a place in Heaven. Paul reminded them that a circumcision of the heart was needed—not performed by human hands, but by the Spirit of God through Christ.

“Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ. When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins” (Colossians 2:11, 13 NIV).

Adoration **C**onfession **T**hankfulness **S**upplication

“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” Ephesians 6:18 NIV

In each session, we will pray—for ourselves, for others, for our church, and for our nation. As a focus for prayer, use the memory verse, another scripture, or what the Lord has impressed on you from the chapter. No need to be profound or elaborate, just authentic.

Write a simple prayer, including each element here.

A _____

C _____

T _____

S _____

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