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# THE LOOKOUT

JANUARY 2022

## Unit: ROMANS (Part 1)

### Theme: RIGHTEOUS

**Overview:** Romans has been responsible for more church revivals than any other New Testament book. It is proper to spend three months studying it under three separate themes. The first theme has to do with being righteous. Students will learn that God is righteous, and therefore judgment should be left in his hands. Students will learn that Abraham was a good example of being righteous, as was the remnant of Israel. Finally, students will learn what righteous living looks like in daily life.

## HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.

**Tabs** indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.

Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

**WEEK OF JANUARY 9, 2022**

**LESSON AIM:** **Appreciate the righteous judgment of God and commit to leave judging to him.**

**UNIT:** Romans (Part 1)

**THEME:** Righteous

**LESSON TEXT:** Romans 2:1-16

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Matthew 7:1-5; Romans 12:17-19; Psalm 7:6-11

## RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT

BY MARK SCOTT

Parents and teachers taught us, “When you point your finger at someone else, three fingers are pointing back at you.” Judging others comes at a high cost. Ultimately it will come home to roost. Jesus taught the same thing (Matthew 7:1-5).

These first two lessons in Romans deal with God’s righteous character evident in his wrath and judgment. Beneath the radar was the tension between Jew and Gentile in regard to salvation. If the wrath of God is poured out on the Gentiles (Romans 1:18-32), the Jews could think they get a pass. They might reason, “Get ‘em, God. Sic ‘em” (similar to Israel in Amos’s day—Amos 1:3–2:3). Paul essentially said, “Not so fast.” In this section, Paul advanced his argument that all have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory (Romans 3:23).

### Passing Judgment

Romans 2:1-4

Jews have no *excuse* (apology) when they *pass judgment on someone else*. Let the record show that we must make judgments in life (John 7:24). A non-discerning person is a fool. But Paul, like Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, condemned unjustified judgment and censorship. The Jews evidently were doing this against their Gentile brothers and sisters. Some form of the word *judgment* occurs in this text 10 times. Wrongheaded judgment is offensive to God.

When we condemn others we also condemn ourselves because we are hypocritical. We are guilty of seeing in others what we fail to see in ourselves. This thought should give us pause. We *think* (reckon or count) we will *escape God’s judgment*. In doing this we show *contempt* (presumption) for God and presume on his *kindness*. God’s *kindness, forbearance and patience* (long-suffering) are intended to produce *repentance* (cf. Galatians 5:22). So be careful, little heart, when you judge.

### Receiving Judgment

Romans 2:5-11

Judgment belongs totally in the hands of God because human judgment is most often skewed. God’s judgment is “based on truth” (Romans 2:2), and he never shows *favoritism* (to show partiality by regarding the face of someone). *Stubbornness* (dryness or hardness) and an *unrepentant heart* cause God to store up wrath for the ultimate Judgment Day. On that great day, his righteous judgment *will be revealed* and “people’s secrets” will be judged “through Jesus Christ” (Romans 2:16; cf. Revelation 20:11-15).

For a book that so strongly emphasizes that people are saved by grace and not by law, Romans sounds very much like the Gospels at this point. There is no lack of harmony between Paul and Jesus though. There are imperatives of salvation in the New Testament. They evidence real faith. Therefore they cannot be dismissed. God’s people are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8). The imperatives in and of themselves cannot save. But all of them demonstrate real faith, which is why Scripture can affirm that we are saved by faith but judged by works.

People who persist *in doing good* and who also *seek glory, honor and immortality* get eternal life. On the other hand, people who are *self-seeking* (to work for hire, scheming for themselves), *who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath* (settled and justified anger) *and anger* (fury to where the “thermometer” explodes). To ensure that no one misunderstands, Paul twice underlined that these things were true for Jew and Gentile.

### Standard for Judgment

Romans 2:12-16

In this section Paul dug down into the real distinction between Jew and Gentile with regard to what standard of judgment would be used against both groups. Neither group was off the hook. Jews and Gentiles both sin—this was Paul’s point in the larger sweep of context. The Gentiles did not have the law of God like the Jews. One might assume they were therefore exempt from judgment. Not so. The parenthetical comment of verses 14-15 teased this out. All people have their *conscience* (moral umpire meaning “to know with”). The Gentiles did not have the law, but they did have their conscience. Paul almost held out for the possibility that if they obeyed their consciences they would be acquitted. But in the end their consciences would *accuse* (to condemn or speak against) them.

On the other hand, the Jews (of which this section is mostly about) had the law. Did they keep it? Hardly. Therefore they would have to be *judged by the law*. For the Jews, just hearing the law was not enough. The only way to be *declared righteous* (or “truly made righteous”) was to *obey the law*. Paul, of course, would go on to argue that no Jew kept the law—except Jesus (Matthew 5:17).

Boasting has to be jettisoned (Romans 3:27). Neither Jew nor Gentile should judge the other. They both will be judged by God since vengeance belongs to him. ■

## APPLICATION

### I GOT CAUGHT

BY DAVID FAUST

Do you ever become angry with other drivers? The slow ones get in your way. Speeders jeopardize everyone's safety. Tailgaters follow too closely. Reckless drivers act like they're competing in the Indianapolis 500, weaving through traffic to gain a few seconds' advantage.

When cars rush by at 90 mph, I mutter, "Where are the police?" I want to see justice done. Up ahead, I want to see lights flashing on a patrol car. I want to see offenders pulled over, getting the punishment they deserve. Do you feel the same way?

#### Making Excuses

But what about the opposite side of the coin? Do you always obey every traffic law (to the letter)? Have you ever surpassed the speed limit because you were late for work . . . or you had to pick up your kids from school . . . or you were distracted by some bad news?

Maybe you inadvertently cut off other cars that were in the blind spot of your rearview mirror. Maybe you truly never saw the road sign that says, "Speed Limit 45." In situations like these, do you hope to see lights flashing on a patrol car, or do you want everyone (including the police) to understand and give you space? When you are the one bending the rules, do you want leniency or justice?

During more than 50 years of driving, I have gotten a few traffic tickets. Not enough to jeopardize my driver's license or my auto insurance, but enough that I cannot claim a perfect driving record. To be honest, at times I have gotten away with breaking the speed limit and I was relieved when no officer pulled me over. Has that ever happened to you? It's human nature to feel righteous indignation toward other offenders while excusing our own actions.

#### Our Shortcomings and God's 'Long-Going'

In Romans 1, the apostle Paul lowers the hammer of God's righteous wrath on Gentile sinners. I picture first-century readers with a Jewish background, saturated in the Scriptures and devoted to God's law, nodding in vigorous agreement with every phrase. "Yes, that's right. You tell them, Paul! Those immoral, idol-worshipping Gentiles deserve God's judgment, that's for sure."

Then in Romans 2, Paul pivots toward his Jewish readers and says, "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" (Romans 2:1). Instead of pointing fingers at the failings of others, are we willing to face our own stubbornness and rebellion? The Word of God and our own consciences convict us. If we are honest with ourselves, who can say, "I have done everything God's law requires"?

When I read Romans 1, I get caught in a self-righteous trap—looking down on other sinners. That chapter shows the seriousness of breaking God's law, but then Romans 2 opens my eyes to my own culpability. I am far from perfect, too. If others deserve God's punishment, what about me?

My shortcomings make me appreciate God's "long-going"—the length he has gone to rescue me. And the more I recognize my own sin and accept responsibility for it, the more empathy, mercy, and grace I can show to others.

**Personal Challenge:** Think of someone who makes you angry. Try to view that person through the Lord's eyes. Ask God to increase your capacity for grace—to fill your heart with empathy and compassion so you can be forgiving and forbearing toward others. ■

## DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. When and how did you sense God's unconditional and saving love this week?
2. In what areas of your life do you find it easiest to obey God? In what areas is it most difficult?

Ask two people to read aloud **Romans 2:1-16** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to restate the passage in their own words in a minute or less.

3. What would you change or add to that restatement of the passage?
4. What do you learn about God from this passage?
5. What do you learn about humans?
6. Let's dig deeper into the passage:
  - Why should we as Christ followers refrain from passing judgment on one another?
  - What comparisons and contrasts did Paul make between Jews and Gentiles?
  - How is God's judgment described?
  - What consequences face people who pass judgment on others?
  - Most Bible interpreters believe the Scripture talks of two coming judgments on humans. In the first, the "great white throne judgment," unbelievers (those whose names are not in the book of life) are judged by their works (Revelation 20:11-15). In the second, the "judgment seat of Christ," those who are saved are judged by their faithfulness (obedience) to Christ to determine their heavenly rewards (2 Corinthians 5:9-10). How does this background help you understand Romans 2:5-16?
7. What do you learn about obeying God and the rewards for that?
8. Take a moment to reflect on God's "kindness, forbearance and patience" (v. 4) for yourself. After a short time of contemplation, discuss how you would tell another person about God's kindness that can lead them to repentance.
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. In what area of your life do you need God's kindness, forbearance, and patience this week?

**For Next Week:** Read and reflect on **Romans 4:1-5, 13-25**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■