



Coming Judgment

GOD WILL JUDGE EVERY PERSON ACCORDING
TO THEIR RESPONSE TO HIM.

Scripture Passage: Romans 2:1-13 Memory Verse: Romans 2:11

Test day in college gives rise to a variety of emotions. Some, fresh from a restful night of sleep, arrive early and place their paper and two pencils carefully on their desk. Others, well-prepared but anxious, fidget at the thought of the unknown. Others rush into the room totally unprepared and knowing it. For them, judgment day is coming! One final group shows up without a single study session. They look prepared and act prepared, but their cavalier approach won't be enough.

With exams, preparation is the key. The same is true with God's final judgment. Some are prepared, having trusted Christ alone for salvation. Others hope that ignoring it will delay it infinitely. But no amount of procrastination will delay judgment forever.

Knowing that this examination day is on God's syllabus should inspire us to understand how the score is graded. Will God grade on the curve? Will our past accomplishments be enough to slide us by at final judgment? Or, is God looking for something specific in that examination? As you dive into Romans 2, reflect on where you are with God today—and how you can help the adults in your group to prepare for His greatest test.



Weekly Podcast: Group Leader Training

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Standing before a judge can be a sobering experience, even if it's only for the speeding ticket in your hand. When a police officer pulls you over and gives you a ticket, you set it aside and get back on the road. However, from that moment on, you know that one day you will be accountable to a judge. On that day, the ticket serves as undeniable proof of your accountability. (PSG, p. 19)

What does a speeding ticket teach us about accountability?



Understand the Context (Romans 2:1–3:20)

In Romans 1:18-25, Paul described the guilt of the Gentiles. Though they had seen evidence of God in creation, they had suppressed the truth and stood without excuse before Him. This led them to trade wisdom for foolishness, and they began to worship idols rather than the living God. As a result, He delivered them to their own immorality.

The refusal of the Gentiles to recognize and honor God as Creator led them to make their own rules for creation (Rom. 1:26-32). They embraced same-sex immorality, and their minds grew darker. They surrendered to unrighteousness, evil, greed, and wickedness. The downward spiral continued as they became slanderers, God-haters, arrogant, proud, boastful, and inventors of evil. They were disobedient to parents, untrustworthy, unloving and unmerciful. They ignored the coming judgment and celebrated ungodliness. The Gentiles served as an example of what happens when a life is free from God's influence.

Jewish readers may have applauded at these words. However, in Romans 2, Paul reminded the Jews that they were no different from the Gentiles when it came to facing God's judgment. They had rejected the truth of the Messiah, and their sin was just as depraved as the Gentiles. They didn't have room for an excuse either!

The Jews knew about judgment teachings from the Scriptures. The Day of the Lord appeared sixteen times in prophetic books. This judgment was described as great (see Zeph. 1:14; Joel 2:31;

Mal. 4:5); troubling (Zeph. 1:15); destructive (Isa. 13:6); desolation (Zeph. 1:15); darkness (Amos 5:18); fire (Joel 2:30); an earthquake (Isa. 2:12-22); wrath (Zeph. 1:15,18; Ezek. 7:19); a battle (Zech. 14:3); and vengeance (Jer. 46:10; Isa. 63:4). The prophets believed that God would judge the nations, including the people of Israel (Amos 2:5-16; 3:1-15; Hos. 13:9-11). They also believed in individual accountability (Jer. 17:5-11; 31:29-30; Ezek. 18:1-32; 33:17-20; Isa. 1:28; 3:10-11; 10:1-4).

Jesus also taught that people would give account to God individually and collectively (Matt. 5:22; 10:15; Luke 10:14). The day of Christ (Phil. 1:10; 2:16) or the Day of the Lord (1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:10) pointed to Christ as the agent who would judge humanity (Matt. 16:27; 19:28; 25:31; Luke 9:26; 17:24; 22:69). The basis of this judgment would be faith in Him (John 3:36). On that day, each person's works will be exposed (Matt. 25:31-46; Jas. 2:14-26; 1 John 2:3-6), and individuals will be shown for what they really are (1 Cor. 3:11-15). Paul wanted the Romans—Jews and Gentiles alike—to recognize their sin, enter a genuine relationship with Christ, and produce good works as a result.

Read Romans 2:1-13. Identify what these verses teach about God's character. What do they teach about human accountability? (PSG, p. 20)

ENGAGE



PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 3** (Poster: *The Doctrine of Man*) and **Pack Item 4** (Poster: *Key Words in Romans*). Make copies of **Pack Item 9** (Handout: *Praying Scripture in Romans*). On a whiteboard write *law*, *accountable*, and *judge*.

ASK:

What does a speeding ticket teach us about accountability? (PSG, p 19)

INTRODUCE:

Read aloud the opening paragraph on page 19 of the PSG. Direct the group to signal with a thumbs up or a thumb down if they agree or disagree with the following statements: *Many people are guilty of speeding on the highways. A speeding ticket usually acts as a deterrent and changes behavior.*

REVIEW:

Point to the words recorded on the whiteboard and ask how the three words are related to one another. Remind adults about Paul's condemnation of the Gentiles in Romans 1:

In Romans 1:18-25, Paul described the guilt of the Gentile world. The Jews likely would have stood and applauded at Paul's proclamation of the Gentiles' guilt. But in chapter 2, Paul reminded the Jews they were no different from the Gentiles when it came to facing God's judgment. . . . God's judgment is based on truth and is impartial—both Jews and Gentiles will be judged in the same way. (PSG, p. 20)

EXPLAIN:

Emphasize the key truth of today's session: *God will judge every person according to their response to Him.*

ASK:

Why will you come before God to be judged?

TRANSITION:

Today's study examines Romans 2, where Paul shifted his focus from the Gentiles to the Jews. In the end, even God's people needed to recognize that knowing, and even obeying, the law did not free them from accountability for their sins.



Group Activity Option

Music

Consider playing a recording of the hymn “Open My Eyes, That I May See” (*Baptist Hymnal*, 2008, No. 443). During the session, distribute hymnals or copies of the song's lyrics. Direct adults to read the words. Ask: **What is the key that sets us free? Why is it important that we make false doctrines disappear?** Highlight the importance of recognizing falsehoods and placing our faith completely in Jesus.

No Excuses (Rom. 2:1-5)

1 Therefore, every one of you who judges is without excuse. For when you judge another, you condemn yourself, since you, the judge, do the same things. **2** Now we know that God's judgment on those who do such things is based on the truth. **3** Do you think—anyone of you who judges those who do such things yet do the same—that you will escape God's judgment? **4** Or do you despise the riches of his kindness, restraint, and patience, not recognizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance? **5** Because of your hardened and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment is revealed.

(v. 1) Paul's use of *therefore* connected his current words to his previous words. In Romans 1, he had detailed the downward spiral of Gentiles who had rejected God's revelation, but in Romans 2, he reminded the Jewish people that they too were *without excuse*. In other words, all of humanity stood guilty before the Lord because sin had infected every person since Eden, except Jesus. For that reason, no one had a just basis to *judge another* person. People can be lost in unrighteousness, but they also can be lost in self-righteousness.

Jesus had warned against judging others in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 7:1). This is not a simple evaluation of someone's actions or holding them accountable. Rather, it involves hypocrisy, where the one doing the judging is doing *the same things*. The verb's present tense indicates that a "judge" is also a habitual sinner.

(v. 2) Unlike self-righteous human judgment, God's judgment is grounded in *truth*. This is not surprising because God is *truth* (John 14:6; 16:13; 17:17). Therefore, His judgments are always just, whereas humans tend toward a prejudice fueled by self-righteousness. Because God's judgment is based on His true and just character, it is impartial, not hypocritical.

(v. 3) Unlike God's judgment, human systems of judgment break down. People often believe that God grades on a curve or that "good" people are somehow exempt from His judgment. Paul knew that the Jews judged the Gentiles' sexual sin and idolatry (Rom. 1:24-27), but they were unwilling to deal with their own wickedness (1:29-31). They believed they would *escape* judgment by comparing their sin to the sins of others.

Paul asked the Romans a question. Did they think they could judge others and yet *do the same* as the Gentiles they condemned? The truth

is that God judges all sin, not merely certain sins. Gentiles had no excuse, but neither did the Jews. All will stand before the truth-based judgment of God, guilty and in need of a Savior.

(v. 4) While Paul did not excuse sin, neither did he leave his readers without hope. He reminded them that by judging others they *despise the riches* of God's *kindness, restraint, and patience*. The Lord demonstrates self-restraint in not immediately destroying sinners (2 Pet. 3:15). Some assume this *kindness* means that He never judges sinners, while others believe it only applies to themselves. In Romans, the apostle established the universality of sin and humanity's universal guilt before God.

Paul further explained that God's patience leads people to *repentance*. Realizing they were sinners and that God is withholding His final judgment should create a yearning in people's hearts to turn from their sin to the Father.

(v. 5) However, rather than experiencing God's kindness through repentance, many display a *hardened and unrepentant heart*. In Greek, the word *hardened* serves as the root for the hardening of the arteries (*arteriosclerosis*). Instead of the new heart promised by Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31-34), these Romans had uncircumcised hearts (Deut. 30:6) that were not repentant or receptive to God.

Those who know the truth but resist it are *storing up wrath* that God would pour out on them. Judgment delayed is not justice denied. On a coming day, God will reveal His *righteous judgment*. For believers, that day will be a tremendous reminder of the kindness of God. For unbelievers, though, it will be the outpouring of delayed justice.

EXPLORE Romans 2:1-5



APPLICATION POINT: We should focus on our own sin rather than judging others.

REVIEW:

Write *No excuses* on the whiteboard. Remind the group that in Romans 1:18-25, Paul focused on the Gentiles having no excuses for their sin. Explain that in Romans 2:1-5, Paul shared that the Jewish people had no excuses either.

READ:

Invite a volunteer to read aloud Romans 2:1-5 as the group counts the number of times words like “judge” are used.

GUIDE:

Read aloud Matthew 7:1 to note Jesus’s words about judging others. Explain what kind of judgment Paul was addressing:

Evaluation doesn’t mean condemnation. When we condemn others, we pass judgment on their sin while we exhibit the same sinful behavior. If we don’t think that we will face God’s judgment when we condemn others, we have deceived ourselves. We will not escape God’s verdict on our hypocrisy. (PSG, p. 21)

DISCUSS:

Direct attention to **Pack Item 3** (Poster: *The Doctrine of Man*). Lead adults to suggest ways Paul’s words in verses 1-5 align with this statement about humanity. Note that our universal guilt removes any moral high ground for judging others.

ASK:

Why do individuals tend to judge others while overlooking their own sin? (PSG, p. 22)

IDENTIFY:

Guide the group to identify the three characteristics of God in Romans 2:4. Point out that all people live under God’s judgment, but He delays judgment to move people toward repentance. Emphasize that one day, though, the ones who reject His kindness will face His wrath.



Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Mirror

Display a mirror. Encourage adults to share something they noticed about themselves the last time they looked in a mirror. Explain that sometimes it’s easier to ignore things we don’t want to see by turning the mirror on others. Share that in Romans 2, Paul warned the Jews not to think of themselves as superior but to take a good look at themselves. Note that contemporary believers also need to make sure they are evaluating their lives honestly before God. Say: *Every person has sinned, so every person is accountable before God. But we can find mercy and forgiveness through Jesus.*

Perfect Standard (Rom. 2:6-11)

6 He will repay each one according to his works: **7** eternal life to those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor, and immortality; **8** but wrath and anger to those who are self-seeking and disobey the truth while obeying unrighteousness. **9** There will be affliction and distress for every human being who does evil, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek; **10** but glory, honor, and peace for everyone who does what is good, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek. **11** For there is no favoritism with God.

(vv. 6-8) The Old Testament clearly teaches that individuals will be judged according to their own works (Job 34:11; Ps. 62:12; Prov. 24:12; Jer. 17:10; 32:19). The New Testament sets the same standard (Matt. 16:27; 1 Cor. 3:8; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 2:23; 20:12; 22:12). Some have incorrectly taught that these verses indicate salvation is achieved by works, but Paul left no doubt. Salvation comes through faith, not works (Eph. 2:8-10).

Here, Paul quoted Psalm 62:12 and Proverbs 24:12 to demonstrate this truth. God **will repay** people for their **works**, but this defined the basis of judgment, not the path to salvation.

Paul divided people into two categories. First, some **seek glory, honor, and immortality** in response to what God has done for them. These people find **eternal life** and demonstrate this new life by **doing good**. Again, Paul did not teach that anyone is saved by works. Rather, one's actions attest to a relationship with Christ.

Others **disobey the truth** and pursue **unrighteousness**. While God longs to save people, **self-seeking** lifestyles lead to His **wrath and anger**. *Wrath* describes a slow-burning antagonism, while *anger* is a sudden burst. While we are not saved by our works, we will be judged for evil works and rewarded for good works.

(v. 9) Paul used two words to describe what sinners will face. **Affliction** is a general word for trials, while **distress** describes being squeezed or pressed, either outwardly or inwardly. The fact that **every human being** who practices evil faces this stress means that we will stand before God individually rather than as a group. Paul noted that judgment would come **first to the Jew**, followed closely by **the Greek**. But none are exempt.

(v. 10) In contrast, those who do **what is good** will receive **glory, honor, and peace**. Those who are reconciled to God seek the things of God

rather than their own selfish desires. Notice that Paul included the same phrasing as the previous verse—**first to the Jew, and also to the Greek**. The promises of God for salvation and for final judgment are not based on nationality or ethnicity but on people's response to Him (Eph. 2:8-10).

(v. 11) Paul's argument hinged on God's innate fairness. There is **no favoritism with God**, a principle which the Bible consistently teaches (Deut. 10:17; 2 Chron. 19:7; Job 34:19; Acts 10:34; Gal. 2:6; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25; 1 Pet. 1:17). Though Israel may have enjoyed some privileges as God's people (Rom. 9:4-5), ethnic background and racial privilege will not deter Him from either blessing or punishing them based upon their deeds.

Praying Scripture

Romans 2:11

Spend time praying Scripture using Romans 2:11. Read the verse, then respond to these questions:

- How does God reveal Himself in this verse?
- How should I respond to what He reveals?

Example: Thank God for not playing favorites with His grace, and ask Him to help you see every person the way He sees them, with no favoritism.

During the session, invite adults to pray this Scripture as well. You and the adults in your group can also take advantage of the Explore the Bible Prayer Guide. This QR code also appears on page 18 of the *Personal Study Guide*.



Prayer Guide

Scan here for a weekly prayer guide based on this quarter's Bible passages.

EXPLORE Romans 2:6-11



APPLICATION POINT: Our eternal destiny is based on our response to God in this life.

DRAW:

Draw two columns on the whiteboard or a large sheet of paper. Label one column *righteous* and the other *unrighteous*.

READ:

Instruct the group to read Romans 2:6-11, looking for characteristics of the righteous and the unrighteous.

RECORD:

Direct the group to work in pairs to read the verses again and share the characteristics they discover. After a few minutes, allow a few volunteers to share their responses. Record their answers on the chart.

EXPLAIN:

Point out that Paul wanted both Jews and the Gentiles to realize that good works do not provide salvation. Highlight the truth that good works bring glory to God and reveal our relationship with Him, but they will never save anyone from judgment.

DISCUSS:

Based on these verses, what is the key to a healthy relationship with God? (PSG, p. 24)

DISCUSS:

To illustrate Paul's point, share the following case study:

John and Sam both love to play golf. On a par three hole, John takes three strokes and records a par, while Sam takes five strokes and records a par. Sam thinks he deserves the same score as his friend. Ask: **How do people treat God with indifference and expect the same result as their friend who honors God? How do Paul's words in these verses relate to that?**

REVIEW:

Emphasize God's impartiality when it comes to judgment:

God judges all people in the very same way. There is no favoritism with God. . . . Like the Jews of the first century, some individuals today may view themselves as uniquely special to God because of their heritage. . . . Nothing could be further from the truth. Nobody can count on favoritism with God to give them a right relationship with Him. (PSG, pp. 23-24)

PRAY:

Distribute copies of **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Romans*). Encourage adults to pray Romans 2:11 back to God as noted on page 30 of the Leader Guide.



One Way (Rom. 2:12-13)

12 For all who sin without the law will also perish without the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. **13** For the hearers of the law are not righteous before God, but the doers of the law will be justified.

(v. 12) Paul affirmed that the eternal consequences of sin are universal. Both those who know the law and those who reject the law face judgment as sinners. Hearing the gospel is not sufficient for salvation. Individuals would need to fulfill the requirements of the law perfectly, which is impossible. As a result, salvation comes only through a personal relationship with Christ who justifies us (Rom. 8:4).

One key difference between the Jews and Gentiles in Rome was that the Israelites possessed the law. As a result, they knew the righteous requirements of God. In contrast, the Gentiles broke the law in ignorance. Paul declared that, in the end, everyone would be judged personally for their sin.

Those who **•sin without the law** (Gentiles) will **perish** without the law. The Greek word rendered *perish* also occurs in John 3:16 and 1 Corinthians 1:18. It describes something that has been ruined, destroyed, or lost. As noted, ignorance of the gospel does not excuse people from God's judgment. These people will be judged **without the law**, condemned on the basis of natural revelation. This is one motivation for believers to share the gospel.

Likewise, those who **sin under the law will be judged by the law**. While the Gentiles stood under judgment by natural revelation found in creation, the Jews stood under judgment by the special revelation of the law given by God to Moses. They knew the law and still transgressed it. Ultimately, though, both the Jew and the Gentile stood condemned because they were alienated from Christ.

(v. 13) Again, Paul divided his listeners in two categories, but it was not "Jews" and "Gentiles." The first category was **hearers of the law**. Moses had written that people would live by hearing and obeying God's laws (Lev. 18:5). The Lord was concerned with both understanding His ways and submitting to them. Even the *hearers of the law* were not righteous because they heard. They also had to keep the law, something no one has done

perfectly except Jesus (Rom. 3:20,23; Gal. 2:16; Jas. 2:8-11). The law gave the Jews no advantage in terms of God's judgment because they had failed to obey the law once God gave it to them.

If neither Jews nor Gentiles were **righteous before God** on their own merits, Paul's readers probably wondered who could be right with Him. The answer is that only **doers of the law** can be **•justified**. This is an amazing pronouncement, because all fall short of God's righteous standard. Jesus alone was perfect in obedience and without sin (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 John 3:5). But before Paul got to the substitutionary nature of Jesus's death and resurrection, he had to establish the need for it, which is a primary focus in Romans 1-3.

The word *justified* is derived from the legal world. It describes a person who is declared innocent by a judge. Spiritually, though, this raises a huge question. If all people are sinners (as Paul emphasized throughout chapters 1-2), how can any of them be declared righteous?

Paul was setting the stage for a logical argument supporting justification through faith in Jesus Christ—something he would flesh out as the letter progressed. All are sinners, and all deserve judgment. However, through the substitutionary death of Jesus and by faith, a person can be made right with God. It matters not whether that person knew the law or not—or even obeyed the law or not. What matters is absolute faith in Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. This was a vital part of any explanation of the gospel.

Key Doctrine

Man

In the beginning man was innocent of sin and was endowed by his Creator with freedom of choice. By his free choice man sinned against God and brought sin into the human race. (See Genesis 3; Psalm 51:5.)

EXPLORE Romans 2:12-13



APPLICATION POINT: Unbelievers need to understand that good works will not justify them before God.

READ:

Invite a volunteer to read Romans 2:12-13 as the group listens for how God responds to those who hear or know His commands, yet refuse to obey them.

GUIDE:

Encourage adults to consider the distinctions between hearing God's words and obeying God's words. Discuss why Paul (and God) would place such an emphasis on doing, not just hearing.

REVIEW:

Summarize this information from page 25 of the PSG to dig deeper into the need for obedience:

“For anyone to be righteous before God, they would need to do more than just hear the words of Scripture. They had to be doers. Being a doer does not suggest that people can work their way into being right with God. . . . Only one person who has ever lived was a righteous doer of the law—Jesus Christ. [But] doers of the law are those who put their faith in Him.”

ASK:

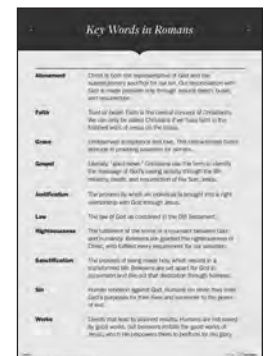
Why can't my good works make me right with God?
(PSG, p. 26)

INSTRUCT:

Encourage a few volunteers to define “justification.” Direct attention to **Pack Item 4** (*Poster: Key Words in Romans*) and highlight the definition. Note other words that appear in these verses (examples: *sin*, *law*, *righteous*). Emphasize that hearing the gospel is not sufficient for salvation. Share that people must embrace Jesus's sacrifice and His offer of salvation.

SHARE:

As time allows, walk the group through the Plan of Salvation on the inside front cover the PSG. Encourage them to reflect on what they are trusting to justify themselves before God. Assure adults that you are available to speak with anyone who has questions about a personal relationship with Jesus.



Group Activity Option

Bible Skill

People have used Romans 2:13 and other passages to claim that salvation is achieved by works that are needed in addition to faith. Read the following passages and determine what the Bible teaches about salvation by faith: John 6:28-29; 11:26; Acts 16:31; Rom. 1:17; 4:6-8; 6:23; Eph. 2:8; Phil. 3:9. **How do these verses relate to Paul's words to the Romans about the universality of judgment?**

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 27 of the *Personal Study Guide*:

- *We should focus on our own sin rather than judging others.*
- *Our eternal destination is based on our response to God in this life.*
- *Unbelievers need to understand that good works will not justify them before God.*

DISCUSS:

Place adults in groups of three or four and direct each group to discuss the first set of questions on page 27 of the PSG. After a few minutes, allow volunteers to share what some people trust to be right with God. Encourage the larger group to compare those beliefs to what Paul expressed in Romans 2.

REFLECT:

Highlight the second set of questions on page 27 of the PSG. Challenge adults to spend time during the week reflecting on their personal relationship with Jesus. Remind them that you are available to speak with anyone who has questions about Jesus. Note that even those who have a relationship with Jesus still need to trust Him fully each day.

PRAY:

Refer back to **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Romans*) and encourage the group to pray Romans 2:11 back to God throughout the week. Challenge them to be open to what He says about their own biases and prejudices toward those they think are “more sinful.” Close the session in prayer, asking God to move in powerful ways during the week.

AFTER THE SESSION

Reinforce the session by sending the group a text or email that assures them you are praying for them. Encourage them to share requests with you so your prayers can be more focused. Remind them to read and reflect on the second set of questions from page 27 of the PSG and to make use of **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Romans*). Share that the next session will focus on Romans 3:21–4:5.

ADULT COMMENTARY



Want to go deeper in your study?
Explore the Bible Adult Commentary
offers additional information and biblical
insights related to the key passages.
(Available for purchase at **Lifeway.com**.)

EXPLORE  THE BIBLE.