

August 5  
Lesson 10 (NIV)

# GOD'S

## JUSTICE

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 32

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Romans 2:1-16

### ROMANS 2:1-12

<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. <sup>3</sup> So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? <sup>4</sup> Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

<sup>5</sup> But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. <sup>6</sup> God "will repay each person according to what they have done." <sup>7</sup> To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. <sup>8</sup> But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. <sup>9</sup> There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; <sup>10</sup> but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. <sup>11</sup> For God does not show favoritism.

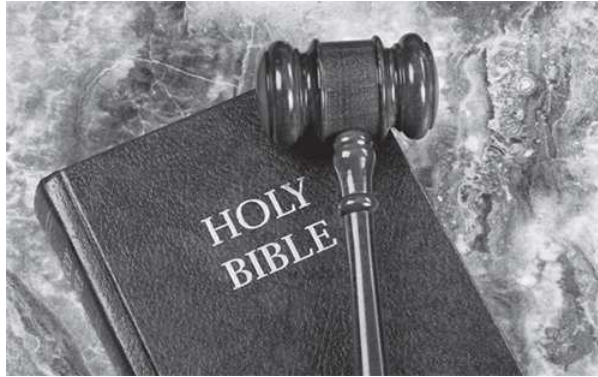


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<sup>12</sup> All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law.

### KEY VERSE

*[There will be] glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism.—Romans 2:10, 11*

### LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize what today's passage says about God's judgment.
2. Explain why judging others brings God's judgment on ourselves.
3. Identify and repent of a sinful discriminatory behavior.

### LESSON OUTLINE

#### Introduction

- A. Insiders Out
- B. Lesson Background

#### I. Human Judge (ROMANS 2:1-4)

- A. Acting with Hypocrisy (v. 1)

B. Awaiting an Exemption (vv. 2, 3)

*Projection*

C. Avoiding Repentance (v. 4)

## II. Heavenly Judge (ROMANS 2:5-12)

A. No Exceptions (vv. 5-10)

B. No Favoritism (vv. 11, 12)

*How Lives Matter*

### Conclusion

A. Not Trivial

B. Prayer

C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Insiders Out

Insider trading is the buying or selling of a public company's stock by those with access to information not generally available. This is seen as unfair to other investors, and laws have been written to discourage it. Insider-trading cases involving high-profile people have been major news stories of the past two decades.

However, it seems that those who made laws forbidding insider trading were exempt from those very laws! In November 2011, the TV show *60 Minutes* aired an exposé on insider trading by members of Congress in both parties. The program cited examples of lawmakers using nonpublic information about pending legislation and other congressional matters to make lucrative investments. Members of Congress had exempted themselves from the very rules they had created, which jailed bankers, CEOs, and others.

After this information was disclosed, Congress took action and passed, with overwhelming support, a law to prevent this abuse. As a result, members of Congress and their staffs are no longer exempt from the insider-trading laws that apply to everyone else.

It's easy to expect more of others than we expect from ourselves. In today's lesson, Paul points out just how dangerous such an attitude can be.

### B. Lesson Background

The letter to the Romans is considered by many to be Paul's greatest literary accomplishment. Are we surprised, then, to learn that he wrote it to a church in a city he had not visited? This lack of face-to-face contact, however, contributes to the book's value. Paul was not writing to a congregation that had heard him preach or teach; therefore there were no assumptions that he left some things unsaid, thinking that the readers already knew his views on a topic. This is of great benefit to us, the modern readers, because we have had no face-to-face contact with Paul either.

Reading Romans carefully gives us the best single picture of what Paul taught to first-century Christians on a wide range of topics, including the origin and consequences of sin, God's plan for justifying sinners by Christ's atoning death, the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, the comforting promise of never being separated from the love of God, the problem of the unbelief of the people of Israel, and many other matters.

Paul wrote Romans at the end of his third missionary journey. Acts gives fewer details concerning this trip compared with the first two, but it does mention that Paul spent three months in Greece (Acts 20:2, 3); the specific Greek city was likely Corinth, located in the province of Achaia. Romans 16:1 mentions someone from Cenchræa (Corinth's port city), who seems to be the delivery person for the letter. All this puts the dating of the letter in AD 57 or 58.

## I. Human Judge

(ROMANS 2:1-4)

### A. Acting with Hypocrisy (v. 1)

**<sup>1</sup> 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.**

The opening *therefore* connects what follows with Paul's discourse on God's wrath against sinners in Romans 1:18-32. The strong accusation that follows (*you . . . have no excuse*) is thus not a gentle prodding to do better, but a sweeping condemnation. There are no mitigating factors to the crime, no insanity plea, no attacking the credibility of witnesses, no procedural mistakes by the police. You are guilty, plain and simple.

The Greek word translated *no excuse* occurs also in Romans 1:20, where Paul describes those who are "without excuse" in failing to acknowledge the reality of God. Here, however, his focus has shifted from unbelieving, idolatrous pagans to those among his readers who might consider themselves to be somewhat godly and righteous, especially Jews (whom he will address specifically in Romans 2:17). What is Paul's purpose for shifting his focus in this way?

If we look at Romans 1, Paul's condemnation of the God-deniers is summed up when he says that they worship created things rather than the Creator (1:25). This is a fatal mistake and has led to all sorts of sinful activities, and Paul lists some of those. Such is the background for his accusation in the verse before us. Paul is leading toward the universal statement that "all have sinned" (3:23). For Paul, both riotously wicked Gentiles and respectable law-loving Jews are in the same category: sinners.

Therefore, his conclusion is that those who judge others as more sinful than themselves are condemning themselves with such judgments. *We do the same things*, meaning we engage in sin. We cannot say, "That guy is an 8 on the sin scale and I'm only a 3." It doesn't work that way. We are all sinners according to the judgment of our sinless, holy God.

#### *What Do You Think?*

How do you ensure that you are not guilty of the same shortcomings that you note in others?

#### *Talking Points for Your Discussion*

Regarding people you know personally

Regarding high-profile public figures

Regarding those in groups different from yours

## B. Awaiting an Exemption (vv. 2, 3)

### <sup>2</sup> Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth.

*Such things* include the catalog of sins listed in [Romans 1:29-31](#), the most extensive list found in Paul's writings. This list is not intended to be exhaustive, as shown by Paul's language, since he says "such" things rather than "these very" things.

[Romans 1](#) outlines why sin is rampant among those who have turned from God. Why, then, does sin continue among those who claim to be serving God? For Paul, the second category includes non-Christian Jews as well as some within the church. Paul's logic here is inescapable. Sins are committed when we ignore or fail to take seriously the reality that *God's judgment . . . is based on truth*. By this Paul means that God is the eternal and absolute judge for all men and women, and that God's standards of judgment are also eternal and absolute.

#### *What Do You Think?*

How do you answer the "truth is relative" claim?

#### *Talking Points for Your Discussion*

Evidence you use from Scripture

Evidence from outside Scripture

Using logic

Other

### <sup>3</sup> So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment?

Paul's relentless argument continues, destroying any pretense that less sinful people have the privilege of condemning more sinful people. Consider the illustration of a husband who cheats on his wife only once and a husband who has cheated weekly over the course of five years of marriage. Both are adulterers; both are sinners. And no sinner can *escape God's judgment*. Every person reading Paul's words fits in this category.

#### *What Do You Think?*

Which is the more effective way to win people to Christ: negative messages that cause fear of consequences for rejecting him, or positive messages of hope for accepting him? Why?

#### *Talking Points for Your Discussion*

Considering Bible examples of effective negative messages and events ([Luke 3:7-14](#); etc.)

Considering Bible examples of effective positive messages and events ([Acts 8:26-39](#); etc.)

Considering Bible examples that mix negative and positive somewhat equally ([Acts 2:14-41](#))

## PROJECTION

Most of us can point to behavior in other people that we find sinful, even reprehensible. Ironically, we often are guilty—to some degree—of the same sins we find so evil in others. Psychologists have a word for this: it's called projection. Our criticism of others is often an expression of the guilt we feel for our own sins—a guilt we find uncomfortable acknowledging as a part of our own being.

The subject of our projection may be something as benign as a characteristic that a parent has modeled for us. For example, a child may be angered by a parent's criticism and yet exhibit the same trait in his or her attitude toward the parent.

For the Jews, it had to do with a more serious charge. They saw in the behavior of Gentiles a whole catalog of sins they found to be gross and blameworthy. But Paul has words for them (and for us): they deserved the judgment they placed on the Gentiles for their sinful behavior. They might argue that the Gentiles' sins of the flesh were of a different sort than their own sins of the heart and mind, but in God's eyes there is no difference: sin is sin.

Thus, in condemning others for not living up to God's standards, we, like the Jews, are saying we deserve the same censure. But it is through the death of Christ, which paid the penalty for sin, that God is able to "project" his righteousness on us. Hallelujah!

—C. R. B.

## C. Avoiding Repentance (v. 4)

### <sup>4</sup> Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

If we label the inexcusable people of [Romans 1](#) as "God-deniers," then the inexcusable of [chapter 2](#) would be the "sin-deniers." By seeing sinfulness in comparative rather than absolute terms, they deny its consequences.

Having shown that the sin-deniers will be judged and condemned as will the God-deniers, Paul now intensifies his withering assault: sin-deniers are missing the graciousness of God. This points to the great paradox in understanding our relationship with God. If we understand God as only a judge demanding penalty for sin, we lose sight of God as a loving Father who provides a way out of our sinful dilemma. To rest on the hope that our sins are less serious than that of others amounts to despising the graciousness of God.

But why are God's judgments not immediate? Why does he not punish sins immediately? The answer lies in Paul's characterization of God's grace in terms of *kindness, forbearance, and patience*. The old saying "Justice delayed is justice denied" does not apply. God is patient and wants all sinners to come to *repentance* (compare [2 Peter 3:9](#)).

## II. Heavenly Judge

([ROMANS 2:5-12](#))

## A. No Exceptions (vv. 5-10)

### **5. But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.**

Having briefly touched on the graciousness of God, Paul returns to God as judge. The phrase *your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart* refers not to an emotional condition, which we might call cold-heartedness. Rather, a spiritual condition is in view. A common biblical metaphor for refusal to repent is that of a hard heart ([Matthew 19:8](#); [John 12:40](#); etc.).

Refusal to repent and receive God's grace is willful. It is the opposite of receiving "the riches of his kindness" ([Romans 2:4](#)). Instead, it chooses to store up on God's wrath. This is not the sort of *storing up* that any reasonable person would wish! The wrath of God may be delayed, but it will be revealed on *the day of God's wrath*, or what we commonly think of as Judgment Day (compare [John 12:48](#); [Acts 17:31](#); [2 Peter 3:7](#)).

### **6. God "will repay each person according to what they have done."**

This verse expresses a thought found throughout the Bible (examples: [Psalm 62:12](#); [Proverbs 24:12](#); [Jeremiah 17:10](#); [Matthew 16:27](#); [2 Corinthians 5:10](#); [Revelation 22:12](#)). But the thought is easy to misinterpret if not seen in the light of the entire New Testament witness. The misinterpretation is that we can work our way into Heaven if we pile up enough good deeds. But sin cannot be canceled out by our works. As Paul will clarify in [Romans 3:10](#), no one is righteous. We are not saved by works ([Ephesians 2:8, 9](#)). Even so, the nature of our works indicates the nature of our faith ([James 2:14-26](#)). With the significance of works understood in that sense, there are two possible outcomes.

## HOW TO SAY IT

Achaia Uh-kay-uh.

Cenchrea Sen-kree-uh.

Corinth Kor-inth.

### **7. To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.**

On the Day of Judgment, God will reward those whose faith has resulted in deeds that please him; it is they who will be given *eternal life*. But *persistence* is a key. This carries the idea of endurance and/or patient continuance in various contexts, which Paul uses frequently (examples: [Romans 5:3](#); [8:25](#); [15:4, 5](#); [2 Thessalonians 1:4](#)).

#### *What Do You Think?*

What approach helps you most to maintain the lifestyle of patience and persistence described here? Why?

#### *Talking Points for Your Discussion*

Advantages and drawbacks of mentoring

Advantages and drawbacks of having an accountability partner

Advantages and drawbacks of going it alone with spiritual disciplines

Other

### **8, 9. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.**

#### **There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile;**

The righteous judgment of God upon sinners is universal (*Jew and Gentile*), and Paul views sin through four lenses here. The first lens is the word *self-seeking*. The Greek term behind this (as used also in [2 Corinthians 12:20](#); [Galatians 5:20](#); [Philippians 1:17](#); [2:3](#); and [James 3:14, 16](#)) refers to self-absorbed people whose me-first attitude is a source of strife in the church.

The second is the decision to *reject the truth*. This wording might be surprising to some, because we usually think of truth as something to be accepted or believed. For Paul, more is required. Unless acceptance of God's truth results in godly actions, it is just words. Unless we act on the truths of the faith, we remain in sin.

*Follow evil*, the third lens through which Paul sees sin, is the flip side of the second ([2 Thessalonians 2:12](#) is similarly so). To choose to follow evil is to knowingly defy God, to turn one's back on the Creator of the universe. This is the "thinking [that] became futile" that Paul explained and condemned earlier ([Romans 1:21](#)).

The fourth entry is that way Paul defines a sinful person as one *who does evil*. Some today claim that evil is subjective. One man's good is another man's evil, they say; therefore we should avoid such moral judgments. Paul could not disagree more. The four components together depict a person who fights me-first battles, spurns God's patterns of right behavior, and chooses to do things that God has forbidden. That is evil behavior.

### **10. but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.**

The first and second halves of this verse are nearly mirror images of the first and second halves, respectively, of [verse 9](#). Thus does Paul link his points together. But the apparent cause and effect connection between *glory, honor and peace* and *doing good* seems to point again toward the concept of "works righteousness."

To the comments on [verse 6](#), above, in this regard, we can mention two theories of note. One theory is that Paul is speaking only hypothetically: those whose good works add up to a score of 100 percent and whose sin is zero earn the rewards listed. But since all have sinned ([Romans 3:23](#)), this is only a theoretical possibility. The second theory is that Paul is specifically thinking of Christians, the nature of their good works being an indicator of the presence of saving faith.

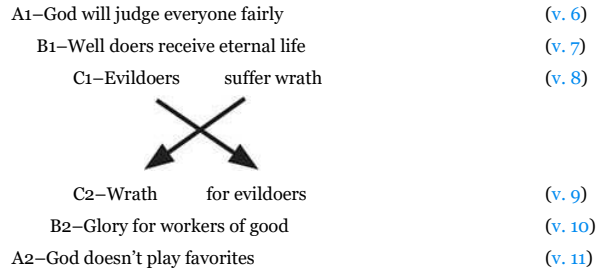
The phrase *first for the Jew, then for the Gentile* and its near twin in [verse 9](#), above, seem to reveal at least part of Paul's intent: he is establishing what the standard of God's judgment will not be. That judgment will not be on the basis of religious heritage or ancestry. Paul may be establishing more than this, but he is not establishing less. This fact can undergird either of the two theories.

## B. No Favoritism (vv. 11, 12)

### **11. For God does not show favoritism.**

This verse forms one of two bookends of a subsection of Paul's thought. The other bookend is [Romans 2:6](#).

The complicated interlinking of Paul's thoughts is made clearer by a diagram:



The most important points occur at the outer edges, the bookends—but it's actually just a single point from two perspectives. Paul opened this subsection of thought by discussing God's impartial judgment (A<sup>1</sup>) applied in a positive sense (B<sup>1</sup>), then in a negative sense (C<sup>1</sup>). He then reversed the pattern by moving from the application of judgment in a negative sense (C<sup>2</sup>) to its application in a positive sense (B<sup>2</sup>) to repeat the point of [Romans 2:6](#) in the verse before us (A<sup>2</sup>).

The phrase *does not show favoritism* means that all humans are equal in the sight of God when it comes to sin and salvation. Regarding access to salvation, God does not base his judgments on people's biological or ethnic distinctions ([Galatians 3:28](#)). Jews are not privileged in this way. The Jewish law will be no defense for Jews on the Day of Judgment, for they have not kept it perfectly ([Acts 7:53](#)). All Jews, like all Gentiles, are sinners in the eyes of God.

#### *What Do You Think?*

What have you found to be most helpful in avoiding the ancient Jews' error of seeing themselves as part of a favored religious elite? Why?

#### *Talking Points for Your Discussion*

- Favorite Scriptures that help
- Spiritual disciplines that help
- Positive role models that help
- Other

### **HOW LIVES MATTER**

The year 2016 was marked by a very large number of shootings in the United States involving police and black citizens. No part of the country seemed to be safe from the violence. Sometimes the citizens were the ones shot, and sometimes it was the police. Sometimes the response to shootings by police was rioting, sometimes sniper shots that killed police officers, and sometimes peaceful demonstrations. Many protestors thought that the police valued the lives of certain people less than the lives of others.

Each side in the public debate marshaled statistics to support its case. And each side had its partisans who were all too quick to see the other side as the villains. Both sides called for equality under the law, but just how that equality was to be defined and manifested was a point of disagreement.

We should be grateful that God judges people without looking at the superficial elements that bias human judgments. His unbiased evaluations apply not only to the final Day of Judgment, but also to day-to-day life (example: [1 Samuel 16:7](#)). Jesus seeks disciples from every nation and race “in whom there is no deceit” ([John 1:47](#)), followers whose uniform is nothing more or less than “the full armor of God” ([Ephesians 6:11](#)). Can you help recruit some today? Before attempting to do so, make sure you *are* one.

—C. R. B.

#### **<sup>12</sup> All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law.**

In the end, Jews and Gentiles both come under the same judgment: they are sinners. Paul later teaches that the great value of the Jewish law is to define sin more clearly ([Romans 7:7](#)). We see the expectations of God quite clearly. But this is not a consoling factor, for everyone who expects to be judged by this law will be found guilty. Those without access to the Jewish law (the vast majority of the Roman world) will still be judged and condemned as sinners “since what may be known about God is plain to them” ([1:19](#)). All are under the power of sin ([3:9](#)). Without Jesus, there is no hope.



Sheet 3—Summer 2018, *Adult Resources*, Standard Lesson Quarterly® Curriculum

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Visual for Lesson 10. Ask learners what Scriptures they would add next to [Romans 2:9-11](#) on this gavel to reflect the theme of the depiction.

## Conclusion

### A. Not Trivial

God's system of judgment is perfectly just: if we do not sin, we will be judged as righteous. But our sin means we deserve God's judgment of death. We may think it unfair that a single sin could cancel a lifetime of righteous choices, but we know that is never the case. We are not good people with trivial sin problems. We are sinners who are sometimes coated with a thin veneer of righteous appearance. The sinful part of us is dense and deep, and we do not have to scratch the surface very hard to uncover it. This sin has brought alienation from God and threat of a harsh judgment for eternity.

This is not Paul's last word, however. The great good news of Paul is that we can be forgiven and restored to a proper relationship with God. That relationship is not based on our merits, but on faith in Jesus Christ, who paid our sin penalty.

### B. Prayer

Father God, help us not to forget the offense that sin is to you! Help us long for your holiness, trusting you to count us righteous through faith in your Son. We pray this in his name. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

God's law is a mirror in which we see our flaws, not a club with which to punish others for theirs.

## INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with NIV® Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the NIV® Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

### Into the Lesson

Ask the class to define *blind ambition* (expected response: when the drive to succeed comes at the expense of everything else). Ask, "What are some historical examples of blind ambition?" (Many responses are possible, including Bernie Madoff and Richard Nixon). Discuss the disaster these people brought on others and themselves.

Say, "Today we're not going to take on the big guns of blind ambition. We'll start small with just our own attitudes that might blind us to justice."

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the "Blind Justice" photo from the reproducible page, which can be downloaded. Ask, "Who is this?" (Expected response: a representation of the ancient Roman goddess of justice—Justitia, or Lady Justice). "What do her sword, scales, and blindfold symbolize?" (Expected responses: the sword symbolizes law; the scales symbolize equity; the blindfold symbolizes impartiality).

Say, "The idea of 'blind justice' is a good one in terms of eliminating favoritism by being blind to everything but the evidence in an earthly courtroom. But God needs no blindfold to judge impartially."

### Into the Word

Make photocopies of the Scripture from the first page of the lesson. Give each student a copy, along with two colored pencils. Have them go through the text and circle negative words and phrases in one color and positive words and phrases in the other. (*Option.* Rather than having students do this individually, you can use small groups.)

Have groups or individuals summarize their discoveries. Move to whole-class discussion as you ask, "Do you see how the negative terms are linked—with sinful actions bringing harsh consequences?" Affirm valid observations and clarify misconceptions. Then ask, "And do you see how the positive terms link blessings with selfless behavior?" Again, affirm valid observations and clarify misconceptions.

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the "Truths and Consequences" activity from the reproducible page. Work through the text as a class, identifying the truths of what some people do and the consequences of those actions. (Some possible responses: Passing judgment on others results in condemnation in return. / Stubborn and unrepentant hearts invite God's wrath. / Persistence in doing good invites God's gift of eternal life. / Rejecting truth and following evil has no good end. See the answer key at the end of the quarter's reproducible pages for a comprehensive list of expected responses.)

After either alternative, conclude this section by saying, "It's easy to spot 'bad guys' and their bad behavior. But let's remember that Paul points a finger at 'good guys' with a stern warning: everyone is guilty. We have all broken God's law. That's why we need grace."

After pausing for reactions and discussion, continue by pointing out that the lesson text also reveals a critical truth about God: he does not show favoritism. No one will be judged on the basis of religious heritage or ethnic ancestry. The consequence of that truth is that his judgment is right.

### Into Life

Say, "On a scale of 1 to 10—1 being a Madoff-type of blind ambition and 10 being Jesus' selfless ambition and service to humankind—how would you rate yourself? No matter how we rate ourselves, we are all guilty sinners. But if just the people in this room could love God and others a notch more and self a notch less, can you imagine what difference that would make?"

Give participants a chance to respond, but don't put anyone on the spot. Point out that the church of millions today began small, with a core group of only about 120 ([Acts 1:15](#)), led by flawed apostles.