

## SERMON NOTES

SERIES: Romans: God's Power Salvation

TITLE: Do Good People Go to Heaven?

SCRIPTURE: Romans 2:1-16

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The book of Romans is a masterfully written exposition of the gospel of God. Without a doubt, it is the foundation of authentic Christianity and the most articulate, systematic understanding of our faith found in the Bible. Countless lives have been changed by the truth found in this ancient letter, and it continues to change lives today. Interestingly enough, Romans was written to Christians. So, while the good news found in Romans can certainly bring people to faith in Jesus, the actual focus is on how the gospel helps Christians think rightly about God, life, faith, and Christian community. If you want to grow to know God more personal and intimate way, this letter is for you!

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*The Gospel that saves us, changes us. The Gospel that changes us, unites us.*

If you are like most Americans, you believe that after you die—you live forever somewhere. And most people assume that good people go to heaven and they will be one of those good people. It seems fair, right? People who do good things deserve good things—that's fair. What we do in this life determines our destination in the afterlife. But is that assumption true? Romans 2 speaks to this all important assumption.

**The Backstory:** A main reason why Paul is eager to preach the Gospel to Roman *believers* (1:15) is because there is a division in the church between Gentile and Jewish Christians (15:5-8). Neither group fully grasps how the Gospel speaks into this division so Paul wants to equip those believers to be "Gospel Fluent."

Romans 2 is a very difficult passage to understand. Part of the reason is because we tend to read it with a "Gospel-lens." If we do, verses 6-11 seem to teach that salvation is available to people who do "good works." However, from 1:18-3:20 Paul is taking us on a "tour of the human condition." He's not telling us how a person can be "saved" or "justified" before God. He's showing us why God is in the right to condemn all people for their sin. So, let's back up and step back into Paul's flow of thought so far.

Paul is saying: God is in the right to put all people into a right relationship with himself by faith alone in Christ alone (1:1-15, especially 1:16-17). It must be that God's salvation is available only to believers because God is in the right to be angry with everyone else (1:18-3:20). First of all, (1:18-32) Gentiles are under the wrath and coming judgment of God because they have knowingly rebelled against God—they are "without excuse". But, Jews are no better off. Even though they know God and have God's law they do not obey the law (2:1-29) and therefore, they too are "without excuse." (compare 1:20 and 2:1). They stand under the same judgment as people who do not know God. That's the context from a 30,000-foot fly over. So to make sense

of chapter 2, you have to keep in mind that Paul's purpose in this passage is not to tell people how they can be saved, but to tell us why God is righteous and just to declare all people in the wrong, condemned for their sin and therefore, why everyone needs the Gospel

1. Self-righteous Jews are as guilty before God as unrighteous Gentiles (2:1-5).
2. God judges everyone the same way—according to their works. He shows no partiality (2:6-11).
  - A. God will judge everyone according to their works (v.6).
  - B. People who do good will attain eternal life (v.7).
  - C. People who do evil will suffer wrath (v.8).
  - C.' Wrath for those who do evil (v.9).
  - B.' Glory for those who do good (v.10)
  - A.' God shows no partiality (v.11).

Clearly, these verses teach that God judges people according to their works. People who do good things attain eternal life. People who don't, receive God's wrath. Paul is not describing Christians here. Verse 6-11 describe what the Jews believe. Good people—the Jews—go to heaven and bad people—everyone else—go to hell. Yes, apart from Christ, God's judgment is based on works. It's not good people go to heaven but perfect people. The problem is, no one can perfectly live up to their own personal standards much less God's perfect standard.

3. God's truth/law, in some way, is available to all people, but since no one keeps it perfectly, Jesus will stand as their judge on the last day (2:12-16).

*How does this apply to us today?*

Good people don't go to heaven. Only perfect people go to heaven.

*For Discussion ...*

1. Have someone read through Romans 2:1-16.
2. How do 1:18-32 fit with 2:1-16? ...
3. Paul anticipates a Jewish person agreeing with him in his condemnation of "bad" Gentiles. Why would his rebuke be so shocking to Jews? (2:1-5)
4. Verses 6-11 seem to teach that good people go to heaven and bad people don't. How can we best understand the teaching of these verses in light of what Paul goes on to say in 3:11-12; 3:20; 3:23?
5. Why is the "good people go to heaven" system unfair?
6. What makes Christianity fair in its offer of forgiveness?