

Why God Waits & How Our Conscience Speaks  
Romans 2:1-16  
The Beauty of God's Grace

By Dave Urbanski

As we continued this past Sunday in our study of Romans, Pastor Scott took us through the first 16 verses of chapter 2 — and it begins with this sentence: “Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges.”

Whenever we see a word like “therefore,” it signals a kind of resolution or turning point regarding an idea that had just been mentioned or discussed — and in this case, it's what we had just studied at the end of chapter 1 the previous week.

And how did that chapter end? Paul goes through a very long list of sins that “they” commit — “they” being the unrighteous — and then Paul proclaims the following: “Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.”

So here we are in chapter 2, and Paul suddenly turns the spotlight from the unrighteous who hate God and do not acknowledge him and regularly commit sins in very visible ways — and now points it at those who consider themselves righteous. Those who look down on others and think to themselves, “I'm not like them. I'm better than them.” Even those who consider themselves religious.

But Paul isn't letting them off the hook, either, as he continues in the first verse of chapter 2, “For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things.” Ouch! If we're being completely honest, isn't that all of us to one extent or another?

Yet, as verses 2 and 3 state, we all can easily drift into error and somehow claim that our works, our “righteous” behavior, can save us. But such efforts are futile — and simply underscore our utter depravity in the face of God's

correct expectation of perfection. He tolerates no hint of sin whatsoever. And we know we don't measure up.

I'm glad Pastor Scott brought up the issue of good things happening to bad people, which very likely is a much bigger issue among Christians that we'd care to admit. First off, we automatically get ourselves in trouble — as the previous verses show — when we consider ourselves “good” in comparison to “bad” people, because by God's measure all of us are “bad.” But the emotional portion of this issue brings to bear our human frailty when we see others who aren't doing the will of God yet are prospering. Why, Lord? What about me?

Pastor Scott hits the nail on the head when he challenges us to consider how good the Lord is to us given that WE ALSO have sin in our lives!

Verse 4 notes, “Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?”

Indeed, there really isn't a “when good things happen to bad people” scenario. We all fall short, we all sin, we all even attempt to hide our sin — despite the fact that the Lord sees ALL OF IT. However, God still does good to us and is patiently waiting for us to repent, to change. Therefore, may we never take lightly God's decision to “hold back the dam” of his wrath. Whatever amount of patience we may think we have, Pastor Scott said the Lord's patience is infinitely bigger. But let us never presume upon God's patience while our sin remains. Let's never play that game.

Verse 5 tells us, “But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.”

Pastor Scott reminded us that the judgment Paul speaks of here — the great white throne judgment — is not something believers in Christ will face, as we possess Christ's perfect righteousness. Why? Because God gave it to us the moment we believed in Jesus. We rely solely on the Son of God's sinless existence, marked by his crucifixion and resurrection, that takes

away our sin. And for those who haven't yet believed, the Lord is still holding out this free gift for anyone to accept.

However, verse 5 is still a stark warning to believers who may find themselves walking down wrong roads despite their salvation. So let us watch that our hearts do not become impenitent and fail to respond to correction and lose sensitivity to sin. Yes, we're saved "once and for all" (Hebrews 10:10) when we believe upon Jesus and ask him to forgive our sins — but after that we must build a lifestyle of repentance in order to grow as believers. We must continue to turn from sin — not to remain saved, but to remain close to Christ.

But then we come to verses 6 through 8: "He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury."

Pastor Scott gave us some valuable information here. These verses may seem on their surface to contradict the idea of salvation through faith in Christ, as they focus on "works" — but Pastor Scott argued that instead Paul actually is building a sturdy case that faith in Christ is the only solution.

As Pastor Scott told us, those who really are perfectly righteous can go straight to heaven — they have no need of a savior. EXCEPT NONE OF US are in that category!

God doesn't weigh our goodness and badness on a scale to see which one outweighs the other as a way of deciding if we go to heaven or hell. If he did use such a scale, the verdict would be much based on a very different measure: Namely, one tiny speck of sin in our lives weighed against a solar-system size record of good things we've done — and we're denied eternal life! That may seem silly or unfair, but God is neither silly nor unfair. His ways are not our ways. And the Lord doesn't tolerate even one tiny speck of sin. Pastor Scott asked a pointed rhetorical question: "How many times do you have to lie to be called a liar?" He then hit us with, "I was kind to 5 people today, but I only murdered 1." Indeed, as we see in the Gospels,

Jesus himself was much harsher in his judgment than what is written in Law. While the Law tells us “do not murder,” Jesus says we can commit murder in our hearts and be guilty of it! We may not be committing physical adultery, but Jesus says if we look lustfully upon another, we commit adultery in our hearts.

So, how can we escape this impossible-to-achieve standard?

The answer: We can't. But that's why Jesus died and rose again for us. And that's why we believe in him and trust in him and rely upon him as our savior — the only one who has met the impossible-to-achieve standard and whose righteousness becomes ours when we believe in him.

Toward the end of our passage Paul extends his examination of the hearts of people across the world, even those who have no knowledge of the law, and he begins to talk about the “conscience.” Pastor Scott explained that God has placed such a conscience inside all of us, and as we wrestle with it — “and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them” in verse 15 — God uses our conscience and waits (“forbearance”) for us to come to repentance.

Ultimately our conscience, Pastor Scott said, is designed to reveal to us that we need a savior! He also noted something most of us can relate to — the sense of freedom and the sense of a weight being lifted from our shoulders when we accept Christ, and it's the idea reflected in Hebrews 10:22 when our hearts are “sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”

Pastor Scott added that the reality of the conscience inside every person can help us as we share the gospel message — particularly when we take to heart the truth that some people have a “seared” conscience. A conscience with a hard, tough, walled-off exterior. Such people may not be in a place where they are ready to take in the gospel message — but that's God's responsibility, not ours. All we can do, as Pastor Scott said, is point out the truth.

But for those who do accept the gospel message, there is forever freedom and forever forgiveness — which should energize us and encourage us to not focus on our past sins (because God isn't doing that!) and move forward in the great adventure of the Christian life.