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**DATE:** February 21, 2026  
**SERIES:** The Gospel Is  
**MESSAGE:** God's Response to Our Desperate Need Pt. 2  
**PASSAGE:** Romans 2:1-29  
**SPEAKER:** Ryan Harmon

So I have a bit of good news and bad news for you this evening. We'll start with the good news. Here's the good news: God doesn't play favorites. With him, there is no preferential treatment for a certain set of people. The playing field is absolutely level when it comes to God. And that's good news.

But here's the bad news: God doesn't play favorites. See, all of us come before him, and we come before a righteous judge who is going to execute justice perfectly. And we each are going to stand before him and receive what we deserve. That's bad news.

Now here's what that means. When we say that the gospel is God's response to our desperate need, we mean everyone. All. Everyone's desperate need. Whether you conceive yourself to be a really bad person or whether you're bound to think of yourself as a pretty good person, a pretty good person that maybe is gonna be okay because of how good you are, no matter who you are, the gospel answers our desperate need, and we are all in desperate need because of sin.

That's what Paul made abundantly clear last week as we were in Romans one, verses 18 to 32. And now as we turn the page and we dig into Romans chapter 2, he is going to make that point emphatically once again. So I'd invite you to open your Bibles with me to Romans chapter 2. Romans chapter 2.

Now last week, Paul took us into the heart of our desperate need, into the dark heart of sin, the reality of sin, that because of sin and humanity's embrace of sin, all creation has been given over to ruin and to chaos. And God, being righteous and being absolutely committed to his creation, God has and will respond. It is sin that provoked his wrath, and because his wrath is provoked, we, as human beings, stand in desperate need. That's what we talked about last week.

Now, as we turn to chapter 2, what we're going to find is that Paul is going to continue to drive this point home, but he's going to address and confront a very human response to that bad news. So here's that human response: it's to think that sin is other people's problems, but not mine. It's to look at someone else and say, I understand, I understand why they are in desperate need, but I am pretty good. I'm pretty moral, I'm pretty religious. I'm a pretty good person. I don't know that I have that same need. And Paul was keenly aware of that very attitude because it actually marked his early life before he was converted.

And so as he continues in chapter 2, he is going to aim straight at that type of attitude. Now, as he does so, he is going to focus on his own countrymen, on very religious, very zealous, Jewish brothers and sisters of his. But, for each one of us, each one of us prone to think that we're good enough, we're religious enough, we're moral enough, this text has something important to say to each of us.

So let's begin in chapter 2, verse 1. Paul says:



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*1 Therefore, you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.*

You have no excuse. Who is he talking to? Who has no excuse? Anyone that thinks they do? Anyone that thinks they do. Anyone that thinks on the merits of their morality, they maybe can be excluded from God's judgment and from the response that God has to sin. Paul makes it very clear, no one has that excuse.

Now, throughout our text this evening, he is going to talk to "you" an awful lot, and that makes it sound as though he's speaking to a specific individual. But really what Paul is doing is he's using a technique called a diatribe, and it essentially is a, it's a fictional dialogue between Paul and a general person that doesn't like what he has to say. And so as we move throughout this text, Paul is going to assume how someone might object to what he has to say.

So the first objection is that maybe everyone is not in as bad of a situation as what Paul said last week in verses 18 to 32 of chapter 1. So Paul gets straight to the point. You, meaning anyone who thinks they should be excused from God's righteous judgment from God's wrath, you have no excuse. To the very religious, the self-righteous, the good enough person who wants to believe they will be excused from the conversation, Paul says, not so fast. Everyone is implicated.

Last week when we were in verse 18, Paul said, the wrath of God is revealed against all unrighteousness and ungodliness. Not some of it. All of it. Sin is a universal problem. And while we as human beings, we are so prone to rank sins and categorize them as acceptable sins, and unacceptable sins, God does none of that. God looks at all of it, and he sees a deviation from what he intended, and therefore no one has an excuse.

Paul also names another reason, though, that no one can have an excuse, and it's this: in the very act of judging another person, looking down on another person, in doing that, we ourselves are affirming there is a standard of right and wrong, there is such a thing as morality. And we, if we are honest, can also then admit we don't always do what is right. We ourselves do things that are wrong occasionally. And because we do things that are wrong, we condemn ourselves when we judge because we're affirming wrong actions. Sin is worthy of judgment. So if there is a standard by which anyone can be judged, then any breaking of that standard is a problem. And here's why. Verse 2, Paul says:

*2 And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things.*

In other words, really bad people who commit really bad sins are going to face the judgment of a righteous God. And pretty good people who commit just, you know, acceptable sins, are going to face the righteous judgment of a holy God. We're all in the same boat. God does not play favorites.

Now last week, Paul named a load of sins. There was a whole catalog of sins, and some of them were quite extreme. The kinds of things you'll get arrested for. And sometimes we say, those are the bad ones. Oh, but he also named some that are just very run of the mill, very everyday, very ordinary sins. Gossip. Talking about someone else, slandering someone's name. Slip into it so easily, and it is an affront to God. That's not how he designed the world. Being unmerciful—that was one of the words last week, unmerciful—that one could be so tricky for us because we might believe that our lack of mercy is actually because we so firmly believe in justice and we might feel quite emboldened in being unmerciful. Paul named a whole list of sins, essentially saying that all of us are in the same boat and he continues that this week. Therefore, no one has an excuse even though we, in our pride, struggle to believe that what we do is worthy of judgment. Paul is abundantly clear, everyone is guilty before God.



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Now, as he continues, he is relentless. He is relentless in naming and calling out the hypocrisy that sits in the heart of the prideful person. Verse 3 he says

*3 But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God?*

It was just highlighting how illogical that is. If you think it's worthy of judgment, what makes you think that you are going to escape judgment? But beyond being illogical, he continues and highlights, it's also quite tragic. This attitude is tragic because of what he says in verse 4:

*4 Or do you think lightly of the riches of his kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? 5 But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,*

Now in this text, Paul uses the word wrath and judgment interchangeably. And last week, we encountered this word wrath, and we talked about how wrath is God's righteous, measured response to his world being corrupted. God responds in wrath. And last week, and already in the verse I repeated from last week, 1:18 of Romans, Paul made it clear that there is a present expression of God's wrath. He says, God's wrath is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness.

Now, we talked last week about how that revelation, the way it's being manifested or showing up right now is that God has given humanity over to sinful ways, essentially giving us what we obsessively desire, but he knows is bad for us, and brings with it its own consequence, its own punishment in and of itself because sin always destroys.

This is a present aspect of his wrath, but here, Paul also highlights that there is this future aspect to God's wrath. There is a wrath that is to come. See, all of history is moving towards its sure end. And the sure end of all of history is the day when God will judge. He will judge the ways of mankind. He will judge perfectly. It's sometimes called the day of judgment, the day of wrath, the day of the Lord. Paul here refers to that. He says the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God. That is a future day when God will make all things right, he will give out his just declaration. But it's a day that's only known to him. We don't know that day. All we know is that it is not yet.

And for Paul, the fact that it is not yet, it is not here yet, means today is a moment of great opportunity, a moment of opportunity because God has delayed that final day of judgment and he's done so out of his kindness and his tolerance and his patience. This is a moment, an opportunity in this present moment, to admit our desperate need, to acknowledge our sin, all the ways we've gone wrong, and then to repent. To surrender. To receive that which only God can do for us. That's what the delay provides an opportunity for.

But what this prideful person, this good enough person, this highly moralistic and religious person, what they refuse to do is just that. They refuse to surrender, to admit their need. I don't know that there are too many things I've encountered that are more tragic than that. You encounter a friend or a loved one, and their need is so obvious. It's objective to everyone around them, but they just unwillingly continue and persist in stubbornness, trying to make it all work out on their own. We know the best thing is to throw up your hands, put up the white flag, surrender.

But it's pride, pride that prevents us from doing that. It's pride that says "I don't know that I'm that bad." When we encounter our badness, we either surrender or I think the other thing we do is what Paul's imaginary debate partner is doing here: we start to negotiate with God. I don't think I'm all that bad. I think I think so-and-so is worse than me. It's pride that drives that. Pride that is unwilling



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to look in the mirror, unwilling to submit to a holy God because pride is too busy looking down on everyone else. It's a desperate situation. Being pretty good, will not cut it. Will not cut it. And here's why, verse 6. Because God, God is the subject, God:

*6 who will render to each person according to his deeds: 7 to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; 8 but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. 9 There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, 10 but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 11 For there is no partiality with God.*

Now in that long run of six verses, Paul placed his main point in the first verse in verse 6 and in the last verse, verse 11. They're saying the same thing. So in verse 6, he says this, God is going to judge individually and fairly each person according to that person's deeds. In other words, God doesn't play favorites. Every person is going to stand before him. Then, in the second point, in verse 11, he summarizes, he says there is no partiality with God.

You see while we as humans, we play favorites, we judge hypocritically, God will not. Because of that, even those of us that think we're pretty good people, we're quite a bit better than the other friends of ours, ultimately, ultimately, that means we are going to stand before holy God, and because we know we have, we have participated in sin, we are going to stand condemned because we do not live lives according to God's design. It's desperate news.

Now, sandwiched in between those two main points comes something that is a little confusing in verses 7, 8, 9, and 10. It almost seems as though Paul is saying in verses 7–10 that it is possible if someone persists in righteousness in doing good, if they resist evil, then when they stand before God, they will be fine, they will stand vindicated. And while that is true, theoretically, in practicality, in real life, it is impossible because no one can do it. No one lives a perfectly right life, no one ever lives life without any degree of sin. All of us fall short. All of us are in desperate need. Everyone stands before righteous God, falling short of the perfect standard.

Therefore. Therefore, we...We wonder. Lord, who can save us? We are stuck. We are desperate. What Paul is making abundantly clear is that although we wish God graded on a curve, he doesn't. Doesn't grade on a curve. Doesn't care what my neighbor has done. He will render, he will judge according to what each person has done.

Now that is a sobering thing, that means I, Ryan, I will stand before him one day, and I will give an account for what I have done. And if what I am trusting, if what I am counting on is that I have done enough good, I am desperately hopeless. I am toast in that moment. If that is where I place my trust, there is no hope. There's no hope.

Now, as Paul continues, you can hear his heart. He so desperately wants those that resist the offer of God to surrender, to understand their need. And as he continues, he is going to now narrow his focus to be very particularly determined to help his countrymen, help the Jewish people. Jewish listeners in his audience understand that they also stand guilty before a righteous God.

See, Paul knew if there was any group of people in his day that were in danger of thinking that maybe they would be excluded from God's wrath, it was very religious Jewish people. He himself thought that. And of course, they had an incredible history with God, the people of Israel were God's chosen people. It was their forefathers that stood at Mount Sinai and God delivered the law to them, and they were the ones that went through the Red Sea. Surely, surely, Paul's conversation partner asks, surely that means something. That we will be excluded, that God's wrath won't come



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upon us in the same way that it comes upon those filthy Gentiles that we agree are pretty bad. But that won't be us, will it, Paul?

So Paul directly addresses them and their defense. Verse 12. He says:

*12 For all who have sinned without the law*

That is the Gentiles, all who have sinned without the law:

*will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law; 13 for it is not the hearers of the law who are just before God, but the doers of the law will be justified. 14 For when Gentiles who do not have the law do instinctively the things of the law, these, not having the law, are a law to themselves, 15 in that they show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, 16 on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.*

Here's Paul's provocative point in a nutshell. Does God care about who has the law or about who does the law? What will put someone right before God? Is it merely having the law, possessing the law, or is it actually doing the law?

Now, there's no question that Gentiles are guilty before God without the law. Paul has made that abundantly clear. Last week and earlier in our text this evening, he's made that plainly clear. But as he proceeded in these verses, here's the catch that he wants to make sure his Jewish listeners fully understand: even though the Jewish people had the law, they do not always do the law. And having the law does not make anyone right with God. Possessing the law does not make anyone right with God. Merely having the law does not solve our desperate need. It is doing the law that matters. That's what he wanted them to know.

And so here's the conclusion: just because the Jewish people were given the law, just because they possess it, doesn't mean that they are excluded from the wrath and the judgment that is to come due to sin. At the end of the day, we are all in the same boat. Jew and Greek alike, Jew and Gentile alike. The law did not and could not resolve their desperate need. Their desperate need. In the same way that for you and I, being a really good person cannot resolve my desperate need, freedom from sin, and from God's wrath, will require something more. We need something more. Something more.

Paul knew. Paul knew for his countrymen this was a deep temptation. This was a deep struggle for them because God had done marvelous things, miraculous things with them. And so as he continues, he addresses how they have taken something that God did give to them for their good, but rather than it being something that leads them to him, it became a source of pride for them. And so he calls them to humility before God. Verse 17, he says:

*17 But if you bear the name "Jew" and rely upon the law*

That phrase is very important, "rely upon the law."

*and boast in God, 18 and know his will and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the law, 19 and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, 20 a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and of truth,*



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Now these are all good things. And they are all part of what God called his people, Israel, to be. They're all good. But Paul continues, verse 21,

*21 you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal? 22 You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? 23 You who boast in the law, through your breaking of the law, do you dishonor God?*

Answer. Yes.

*24 For "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you," just as it is written.*

Did God give the Jewish people the nation of Israel the law? Yes. Did he call them to be a light to the nations, a light that would shine out in the darkness? Absolutely. Does any of that mean, did God ever intend, that those commissions, those callings, would ever require that he turn a blind eye when dealing with sin and wrongdoing? No. It's never what God intended. God gave Israel the law to lead them to himself, to bring them to humility, to understand their ongoing desperate need for him.

But it's as if, in this moment, it's as if God gave them this gift, he wrote them a love letter. And then they took that love letter and made it into a permission slip. He gave them a note in their lunch box. And they turned it into a hall pass. That said, now, because God gave us this, none of this stuff applies to us. They believed the law could remove them from the company of those who are in desperate need. But desperate need is a universal problem. They thought the law could absolve them of sin when in actuality, Paul's made it very clear, the law has accused them. Because they break it.

Everyone is in need. Everyone. You could hear Paul's heart. He just longs to help his people understand this. He had to make them understand the law. External things do not make us right before holy God. Our problem is internal. And no amount of manipulation in our external environment, rearranging of our world, none of that can make us right when what is wrong is deep inside of us. That's precisely what he goes on to drive home as he points now to the outward sign of circumcision. Verse 25, he says:

*25 For indeed, circumcision is of value if you practice the law; but if you are a transgressor of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. 26 So if the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? 27 And he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the law, will he not judge you who though having the letter of the law and circumcision are a transgressor of the law?*

Now, see, circumcision was an external mark of the covenant people. It was an outward sign that identified who they were. Paul's making it abundantly clear, the external side never signed, never made them right with God. That's not how God works. No amount of external things can make me right when it comes to sin.

I've gone to church every weekend this year. I never miss a Life Group. Memorized all the verses. Those are, those are good things. If we are counting on them to make us right before God, then we are in desperate trouble. Because they can't do it. They can't do it. Sin is the problem, and sin can't be resolved by any outward sign or any outward means. No external manipulation of our world can make us right before God, can resolve our desperate need.



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So the question becomes, at this point, two weeks of this deep dive into our desperate need, the big question is, what can fix the problem? The answer is that we need the creator of the universe to intervene on our behalf. That's what we desperately need. That's what Paul is going to get to in the weeks to come. But here in these final two verses of chapter 2, Paul gives us just a little hint, a little glimmer of hope, of what is to come. Verse 28, he says:

*28 For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. 29 But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.*

Our problem, the problem of sin, is an inward problem. It cannot be fixed by outward means. All of us are ungodly. We are unrighteous. We have hearts that are cold towards God and prone to rebel. And what we desperately need is to be given new hearts, to be changed from the inside. That's the righteousness that God requires, an internal righteousness. And there's nothing that we can do that can bring that about. It's not possible in the flesh. It is not possible through the letters of the law, written on stone. It's not possible through any of those things. It is only possible by the Spirit.

This is God's work. It's only possible by the Spirit. All of us are unrighteous. We are ungodly. We are none of us good enough. We are people in desperate need, and the need that we have is only one that God can meet.

God does not show partiality. God doesn't play favorites. It is a level playing field. All of us, as we come to him, there's no preferential treatment. And any can come. It's only through coming to him that our desperate need can be met.

We live in desperate need. We are people in desperate need and thank the Lord, there is hope. There is a solution. Paul said it and we talked about it in our very first week. This is what the gospel is. The gospel is God's power to save, God's power to save, and only God can bring about the inward change that we need. We need new hearts. And we can't do it. But thank God that he can. He can bring it about by the Spirit.

We can't do it on our own, but we can receive it by faith. When we receive the gospel, the gospel, it's God's response to our deepest need.

Our Father, we Acknowledge our need before you, that the unrighteousness, the ungodliness of the world is not an "out there" problem, it is an "in here" problem, and we can't correct what is wrong with us. And so we do thank you. We've already sung about it this evening. We thank you that you did through your Son what we could never do. But this evening we do ask, Lord, that you will help us. Help us to be mindful, as hard as it is for us, to linger in the darkness of sin apart from you. We ask that you'll help us to do it with hearts of confession, that we might be all the more ready to praise you. So we ask that you'll help us do it by your Spirit, and we pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.

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