

**Understand that the section we're in is bracketed by 1:17 and 3:21.** These passages are the bookends which hold 1:19-3:19 together.

**1:17** For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, just as it is written: The righteous will live by faith. <sup>18</sup> For God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

**3:20-21** "But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been revealed, attested by the Law and the Prophets. <sup>22</sup> The righteousness of God is through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe since there is no distinction."

**He's contrasting two things—righteousness which leads to eternal life, and unrighteousness which leads to eternal wrath.**

**We must understand that Paul is leading us to an explanation of "the righteousness" that is revealed in the Gospel of Jesus.**

To get there Paul must, in no uncertain terms, define for us what "unrighteousness is."

What is unrighteousness?

- (1) Rom 1:18-32: Any form of idolatry/atheism that results in flagrant rebellion to God's moral decree. Denying God's existence, and then living under our own authority resulting in immorality.
- (2) Rom 2:1-5: Any form of hypocrisy which condemns those who live in moral depravity. The hypocritical self-righteousness religious person who stands in judgment over others.

So now, the issue here is clearly what constitutes "unrighteousness" before God—why are Gentiles with only the light of creation and conscience condemned, and why are Jews with the light of Torah law equally lost?

Section 2:6-11 is designed to capture the imagination and interest of the very moralist he's offended.

**1. God’s judgment is an unbiased assessment of everyone’s works.** Rom 2:6-11 “He will repay each one according to his works” (Prov 24:12): <sup>7</sup> eternal life to those who by *persistence in doing good* seek glory, honor, and immortality (Rom 3:11 “there is no one righteous; no one who seeks God); but wrath and anger to those who are self-seeking and *disobey the truth* while obeying unrighteousness. <sup>9</sup> There will be affliction and distress for every human being who *does evil*, first to the Jew, (God is fair—he offered the Gospel first to the Jew and will also bring judgment first to them) and also to the Greek; <sup>10</sup> but glory, honor, and peace for everyone who *does what is good*, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek. <sup>11</sup> For there is no favoritism with God.

We can’t get hung up on the issue of whether or not this person who “by persistence in doing good seeks glory, honor and immortality” is merely hypothetical or whether he thinks that some OT Jews and God-fearing Greeks fall into this category. That, in my view, is a wrong way to look at this.

**God is the impartial judge of everyone’s actions.** This reflects the consistent witness of both OT and NT:

Jer 17:10 “I, the Lord, examine the mind, I test the heart to give to each according to his way, according to what his actions deserve.” Lots of OT passages echo this. Jesus himself reflects this very Jewish way of understanding moral judgment when he says to the crowd...

John 5:28-29 “Do not be amazed at this, because a time is coming when all who are in the graves will hear his voice <sup>29</sup> and come out—those who have done good things, to the resurrection of life, but those who have done wicked things, to the resurrection of condemnation.”

2 Cor 5:10 “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may be repaid for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.”

1 Peter 1:17 “If you appeal to the Father who judges impartially according to each one’s work, you are to conduct yourselves in reverence during your time living as strangers.”

Understand, this is a very Jewish way of thinking. God is going to reward the righteous with eternal life and punish the wicked in his wrathful judgment.

So, let’s look closer at this curious statement in v. 7ff.

**Now he really has the moralist’s attention.** He is really talking their language. They would see the same thing that you see—it looks for all the world that Paul is saying that eternal life in God’s Kingdom is the reward of life of doing good—seeking that which is glorious vs. inglorious; that which is honorable vs. shameful, that which leads to immortality vs. pursuing the futility of mortal pursuits.

He’s cast the bait and now will set the hook, reeling them into an inescapable conclusion. He anticipates their warm reception of this statement, then proceeds to show them just how impossible a goal it is apart from faith. Just how futile religious affiliation is apart from grace. How empty external devotion is without the presence of the Holy Spirit to energize the believer toward this life of well-doing.



## **What does the Bible say about eternal life? (Rom 2:7)**

### **Eternal life is literally translated “life everlasting.” “Life without end.”**

- Eternal life begins when we believe in God’s Son. We often quote John 3:16 but I want you to see the rest of the passage. Jn 3:14-15 “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.” Believing is a response of trusting reception. We see Christ lifted high upon the cross, and we trust in what he has done for us on the cross.
- Eternal life is bestowed upon those who do the will of God. What is the will of God? John 6:28-29 “What can we do to perform the works of God?” they asked. <sup>29</sup> Jesus replied, “This is the work of God—that you believe in the one he has sent.” This is clearly an irony. What’s the work that God requires? That we receive the gift of his salvation by faith apart from works.
- Eternal life is to know God through his Son Jesus. John 17:3 “This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and the one you have sent —Jesus Christ.” As we stated last week, this is why people will come and stand before Jesus on the day of judgment and rehearse their religious resumes before him—and he will declare that religious do-goodery as “evil.” And he will call them workers of evil—because they did not know him.
- Eternal life is the reign of grace through the righteousness of Christ. Rom 5:21 “Just as sin reigned in death, so also grace will reign through righteousness resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” The grace that saves us also trains us for godliness.
- Eternal life is a gift. Rom 6:23 “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

This statement in vv. 7-11 Paul is trying to keep the moralist (whom admittedly he has just deeply offended) in the discussion. He seems to hold out the hope of “doing good” resulting in eternal life which is what they want more than anything. This statement on first pass would warm their hearts and keep them intellectually and emotionally engaged in the discussion. Then he is going to show them that the only people this could apply to are those who have received the free offer of grace delivered to the empty hands of faith, resulting in a life of good deeds—works which God has marked out for us.

As we will see this hope is dashed to pieces—unavailable to the stoic moral philosopher or the devout Jewish moralist who insists on Torah righteousness—oblivious to the depths of their own national and personal sin.

**2. God’s judgment is that all who sin also perish.** Rom 2:12-16 “For all who sin *without the law* (of Moses) will also perish without the law (of Moses), and all who sin under the law (of Moses) will be judged by the law. <sup>13</sup> For the hearers of the law (of Moses) are not righteous before God, but the doers of the law (of Moses) will be justified. (So that’s the standard—but the question is who can actually “do” or perform the law to God’s satisfaction?) <sup>14</sup> So, when Gentiles, who do not by nature have the law (of Moses), do what the law demands, they are a law (moral law) to themselves even though they do not have the law (of Moses). <sup>15</sup> They show that the work of the law (moral law) is written on their hearts. Their consciences confirm this. Their competing thoughts either accuse or even excuse them <sup>16</sup> on the day when God judges what people have kept secret, according to my gospel through Christ Jesus.”

So he seems to set out the hope of doing good and receiving eternal life—but now sharply returns to his thesis, his point. Which is everyone, Jew and Gentile alike are condemned.

- Gentiles will “perish” without Moses’ law (2:12a). The “law” here is Moses’ covenant.

The word “perish” is used in the NT to mean “be condemned” or to receive condemnation by God.

You all may be familiar with John 3:16, but let me read the full statement—John 3:14-18 “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. <sup>16</sup> For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not *perish* but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to *condemn* the world, but to *save the world* through him. <sup>18</sup> Anyone who believes in him is *not condemned*, but anyone who does not believe is *already condemned*, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God.”

1 Cor 15:17-18 “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup> Those, then, who have fallen asleep in Christ have also perished.” He’s not saying “those who have died have also died” Understand the NT uses this term “perish” to mean “condemned in judgment.”

Gentiles who lack Moses’ law covenant still acknowledge the natural laws of creation and conscience. When non-Jews who do “by nature” that which the law requires. Here, the word “nature” means “naturally” or “instinctively,” as a matter of the heart. Gentile nations and governments prove that God’s moral law resides in them because they sufficiently create laws forbidding evil and rewarding virtue. By doing so they provide a kind of “law code” for themselves apart from Moses’ covenant.

They may not have Moses’ “court” but they do have, Paul says, an inner “courtroom” comprised of human conscience which either accuses or excuses their ethical behavior. The Gentile is sufficiently aware of the demands of God’s moral law toward others.

**Now, here’s the real shocker that will take up all the space between v. 12-3:19.**

- Jews will “perish” with Moses’ law (2:12b).

Religious affiliation counts for nothing—only perfect obedience to the entire written code counts (2:13).

Moses said in Deut 6:25 “Righteousness will be ours if we are careful to follow **every one of these commands** before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us.” Moses has set the bar impossibly high. No sooner does he set out for them what the law requires—comprehensive obedience, he then prophesies to them that they will not obey it—they will go into exile as a nation.

***Listen, if this were remotely possible, then they wouldn't need an atonement system—they would not need the festival of Yom Kippur.***

Listen to what James writes, James 2:10 “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.”

***Understand that God judges impartially according to our works of obedience to the law—and both the Gentile and the Jew will likewise perish—receive God's judicial condemnation for having not lived up to the law.***

The key to Pau's theology here is Psalm 19. This ancient Jewish song captures what he's been saying about the natural revelation of God in creation and conscience, God's special revelation through the OT, and God's revelation of his moral law in the human conscience. Look at it.

Psalm 19:1-4 The heavens declare the glory of God,  
and the expanse proclaims the work of his hands.

<sup>2</sup> Day after day they pour out speech;  
night after night they communicate knowledge.

<sup>3</sup> There is no speech; there are no words;  
where their voice is not heard.

<sup>4</sup> Their message has gone out to the whole earth,  
and their words to the ends of the world.

So here we have a claim that the heavens “pour forth speech” and that there is no corner of the globe where it's voice cannot be heard.

7. The instruction of the Lord is **perfect**,  
renewing one's life;  
the testimony of the Lord is **trustworthy**,  
making the inexperienced wise.

<sup>8</sup> The precepts of the Lord are **right**,  
making the heart glad;  
the command of the Lord is **radiant**,  
making the eyes light up.

<sup>9</sup> The fear of the Lord is **pure**,  
enduring forever;  
the ordinances of the Lord are **reliable**

and altogether **righteous**.

<sup>10</sup> They are more **desirable** than gold—  
than an abundance of pure gold;  
and sweeter than honey  
dripping from a honeycomb.

<sup>11</sup> In addition, your servant is warned by them,  
and in keeping them there is an **abundant reward**.

Now, this revelation is particular to the Jew—who has God’s written Word, his instructions, precepts and ordinances. And indeed, a life of perfect obedience to them yields a reward.

***But something is missing and the Psalmist knows it...***

Who perceives his unintentional sins?

Cleanse me from my hidden faults.

<sup>13</sup> Moreover, keep your servant from willful sins;  
do not let them rule me.

Then I will be blameless  
and cleansed from blatant rebellion.

<sup>14</sup> May the words of my mouth  
and the meditation of my heart  
be acceptable to you,  
LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.

**Both Jew and Gentile have the light of God’s revelation in creation which daily pours forth the message about the creator to which the idolater and atheist have been blinded in sin.**

**And the Jew in particular has God’s written law**—the revelation of the Messiah in the books of Moses, the Prophets, and the Poets.

**But the dilemma here is that Psalmist perceives that even though he embraces the Torah outwardly—he’s got an internal spiritual problem.** His heart is prone to wander, to commit sin that he isn’t even always aware of, to harbor secret faults that no one knows, despite his best efforts to live blamelessly before God.

At the end of the day the devout, the well-intentioned, the sober minded believer in God who is sympathetic to his righteousness still cries out in desperation for a cleansed conscience.

Now next week starting in Verse 17, Paul is going to begin to lead them to the inescapable conclusion that verse 7 does not describe them. It describes another group of people who have received the gift of the Spirit, and experienced what he calls “circumcision of the heart”—an inner forgiveness and cleansing of sin resulting in a life persists in doing good, that seeks God’s glory, his honor, and the hope of immortality in resurrection.

**Prayer: God we understand this morning that unrighteousness is flagrant and proud disobedience to your moral laws and decrees.**

We understand that to sit in judgment of others—condemning for denying God’s existence and living under their own authority is equally deserving of judgment.

We want to be a witness to our fellow man—testifying to the truth, not being assimilated by the darkness. That as we testify to the truth and proclaim this Gospel which reveals the righteousness of God and your wrath being revealed against all unrighteousness, we pray your Spirit will bring conviction of the truth, of sin, and certain judgment. And we pray that conviction will bring redemption, cleansing from sins hidden and open rebellion in parades in the streets.

And we pray that you will help us to be bold, energized, and faithful witnesses to the truth.