

OPENING SCRIPTURE:

*LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You discern my thoughts from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, and You are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O LORD, You know it all. You have enclosed me behind and before and laid Your hand upon me – Psalm 139:1-5.*

In the latter part of Romans Chapter One, Paul addresses both those who engage in sinful, perverse acts (*particularly sexual immorality, including all forms of homosexuality*) and those who approve of or enable such behavior. He stresses that both groups are ‘*without excuse*’ before God. While Paul specifically mentions *homosexuality*, one can infer that he would also include *transgenderism* had it been known to him. These sins are serious in God's eyes, with Paul stating in verse 32 that those who engage in such actions are ‘*worthy of death*’ – This is not a directive for human punishment but rather an indication of God's right to judge sin as He sees fit, even to the point of what the Bible calls ‘*the sin unto death.*’

Paul also points out that those who approve, support, enable, or encourage such actions are equally guilty, highlighting how **a society that condones such behavior has lost its moral compass**. In fact, the only appropriate response to such things goes beyond simply ignoring the problem; it requires us to confront and oppose individuals, including politicians or church leaders, who endorse what God condemns, for they too stand guilty before God. If a church or denomination endorses this kind of sinful behavior, it has crossed the line into apostasy and is no longer legitimate in the eyes of God.

[READ ROMANS 2:1-16] – As Paul moves through Romans Chapter Two, he continues to address issues dividing the church, particularly between members who came from pagan Roman backgrounds and those who came from religious Jewish backgrounds, noting failures by both groups. *A key theme of Romans is reconciling these divisions and addressing the underlying issues that were dividing the church.*

This is a big challenge; the bifurcation of the congregation in Rome must be resolved – and that is the challenge Paul addresses in Romans 2:1 – 3:8.



Romans 2:1 – 3:8 is a complex section of Romans that requires careful thought to understand the passage properly. The challenge begins in the latter half of Chapter One, where Paul warns against practicing and approving of the sinful acts detailed there. He warns his readers that God's judgment will fall on all who engage in these perversions, but also on those who judge on the basis of self-righteousness. So this is a warning against hypocrisy. Self-righteousness comes into play because those who are judging the ones singled out in Chapter One also engage in sinful behaviors that, as far as God is concerned, are equally egregious.

*This creates an apparent contradiction because the Roman Christians are told on the one hand to oppose sin, while at the same time they are told not to judge others.* Unravelling this apparent contradiction will take up the balance of our passage.

Paul approaches this challenge by first focusing on the Gentile pagan culture, which is the background out of which many of the Roman Christians were saved. In no uncertain terms he con-

demns both the practitioners and the enablers of these acts. This is not a half-baked criticism, for Paul makes it clear that both are without excuse before God. **The key verse in this section is Romans 2:1:** *“Therefore you have no excuse, every one of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself, for you who judge practice the same things<sup>1</sup>.”* Paul’s goal is to bring together these two divergent groups and establish a mutual understanding of how each individual is accountable to God. Idolatry and pride stand behind all sin. The overt sins may differ among people – but sin is sin in the eyes of God.

In Romans 2:11 Paul introduces another important theme: **THE IMPARTIALITY OF GOD**. God always judges fairly. He addresses sin without favoritism, irrespective of the national origin of the sinner (*i.e., Jew or Gentile*). God’s judgment is objective because when he judges, he does so against his own perfect character. He is the objective standard against which all men are measured.

When his people disobey, God judges the intent of their hearts, not just the outward actions they perform. It is not that outward behavior is unimportant – it is – but the motivation and intent of the heart is God’s primary focus. When sin is present in a believer’s life, it eventually results in divine discipline. God is patient but his patience is not unlimited – and perhaps more importantly, his discipline always is designed to bring the sinner to repentance.

Now if repentance is not the response to divine discipline, the expectation turns from mercy to wrath – and God warns his people of this in Zephaniah 1:14-18 and in Romans 2:5-11. Many of the Jewish believers in Rome did not understand this. They anticipated God’s wrath would be exacted against their enemies, but they did not expect to be recipients of God’s disfavor. This is unfortunate because the Prophet Amos had forewarned Israel of this in Amos 5:18-20.

To sum up this section, both Gentiles and Jews are equally guilty before God, and his judgment against them will be imposed objectively and with impartiality.

**[READ ROMANS 2:17-29]** – This passage focuses on the theme of hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is a significant sin, highlighted by Paul in these early chapters. While Paul initially addresses obvious, overt sins like idolatry and perversion among Gentiles, he later critiques the hypocrisy of religious Jews who fail to practice what they preach, despite having the Law of Moses.

The Greek term translated **HYPOCRITE** is *ὑποκριτής* (*pronounced hupokrités*). In CLASSICAL GREEK, XENOPHON and PLATO used this word of *an actor or stage-player*. I am sure you are familiar with the symbols of the two opposing themes in Greek literature: THE SMILING AND CRYING MASKS that represent TRAGEDY and COMEDY. Greek actors wore these masks on stage in order to represent their characters more accurately, and of course, the masks hid the actor’s true identity. The analogy is fitting, for hypocrites present themselves as righteous, while hiding who they really are – *perhaps not behind physical masks* – but in a manner even more deceptive.



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<sup>1</sup> Though Paul uses the phrase, *“for you who judge practice the same things,”* I don’t think this necessarily means the exact same sins are in view – although in some cases that may be the case. If we take the perversions of the Gentiles cited in Chapter One and generalize them as ‘sexual immorality,’ the Jews would be equally guilty before God and therefore in no position to judge the perverse acts of the Gentiles – at least not in a self-righteous manner.

In KOINE GREEK – *the Greek of the New Testament* – ὑποκριτής is used to describe *someone who pretends to be something he or she is not*.

Jesus condemned hypocrisy, urging his people to address their own flaws before judging others. Clear examples of this can be seen in passages such as Matthew 7:5 and 23:27-28, where he refers to the Pharisees and scribes as ‘*whitewashed tombs*’ that outwardly are beautiful but inwardly are corrupt.

Religious Jews were guilty of hypocrisy for failing to uphold the Law of Moses. Jesus condemned them for elevating man-made-traditions over the Word of God. But PAUL did not stop with his criticism of the Jews; hypocrisy extends also to the Church as well as the synagogues, thus corrupting Gentile and Jewish believers equally. The starting point for correcting hypocrisy in our lives is by the process of self-examination.

Verses 17-20 critique the false confidence derived from outward religious rituals. Paul warns against relying on Jewish identity, the Mosaic Law, or circumcision as signs of merit, noting that these often led Israel to pride and a failure to fulfill their mission as a light to the Gentiles. Similarly, modern Christians may place undue confidence in external practices like church attendance or moral behavior, while neglecting inward alignment with God’s will.

Verses 21-14 direct strong criticism at both the Jews and the Gentiles in the Roman Church. Both groups were failing to live according to the moral standards to which they claim to hold and even teach to others. PAUL highlights three representative sins – theft, adultery, and idolatry – as deserving of God’s judgment. He emphasizes that God’s judgment applies to:

*The openly sinful (licentious individuals).*

*The timid (who would sin in the same manner if they dared).*

*Moral critics (who condemn others but are guilty themselves), and ...*

*Religious leaders (who preach virtue but fail to practice it).*

PAUL condemns such hypocrisy as dishonoring to God and quotes Isaiah 52:5 to show how this behavior leads to God’s name being blasphemed among non-believers. His message is a warning that both overt sinners and hypocritical judges are equally accountable to God. Furthermore, Paul stresses that the authenticity of faith is judged by actions, and failing to live by the truths we proclaim brings dishonor to God, whether one is Jewish or Christian.

Finally, in verses 25-29 PAUL addresses an aspect of Jewish culture that must have surprised many of the Jewish believers in ROME, for he redefines circumcision as a spiritual transformation rather than a mere physical act. Though it was historically a covenant sign for the Jews, PAUL argues that true circumcision involves an inward change of the heart, aligning with the New Covenant foretold by Jeremiah and Ezekiel. This New Covenant is based on grace through faith in Jesus Christ, rather than on adherence to the Mosaic Law.

JEREMIAH prophesied nearly six-hundred years earlier that the day will come when THE LORD will make a NEW COVENANT<sup>2</sup> with ISRAEL and JUDAH that will be different from the covenant He made with ISRAEL when He brought the ISRAELITES up from the Land of Egypt. Whereas the OLD COVENANT (*THE MOSAIC LAW*) was written on stone tablets, the NEW COVENANT will be written on the individual hearts of the Jewish people. It will be a transforming covenant that changes the heart of the believer, creating a new relationship with God that is not based on ‘*law-keeping*,’ or on ‘*religious ritual*,’ but on ‘*grace-through-faith in JESUS CHRIST*.’

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<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah 31:27-34

This leads PAUL to suggest a new way of looking at circumcision. No longer will it be an external sign that affects only the body, but it will be a true transformation of the heart ... an internal conversion that is infinitely better than a physical ritual performed on the body. True circumcision was a spiritual act performed by God that changes the person within – and it was to this that the physical sign was to refer. Listen to the words MOSES spoke to the Jewish people:

*Circumcise your heart and stiffen your neck no longer<sup>3</sup> — Moreover, **THE LORD** your God will circumcise your heart and the hearts of your descendants to love **THE LORD** your God with **ALL** your heart, and with **ALL** your soul, so that you may live<sup>4</sup>.*

So the Jew must decide: *‘Do you want an external transformation of the body? Or do you want in internal transformation of the soul?’*

PAUL challenges the Jews' reliance on the Law and external rituals, exposing hypocrisy in their teaching by disobeying the very laws they claim to uphold. He emphasizes that the Law was meant to reveal God's character and lead to godliness, not self-righteousness. True membership in God's covenant community is defined by the inward work of the Holy Spirit, not external markers like circumcision.

PAUL'S teachings call for self-examination within the church. He urges believers to avoid hypocrisy, to live by faith, and to prioritize internal transformation over external rituals. Baptism and communion, while important symbols, are no substitute for a genuine, yielded relationship with God. Ultimately, justification and sanctification arise from inward renewal by the Holy Spirit, not outward actions.

#### **APPLICATIONS:**

So how should we apply PAUL'S teachings today at GRACE BIBLE CHURCH?

- (HOW CAN WE AVOID) **HYPOCRISY IN THE CHURCH?** Just as PAUL warned his readers about **HYPOCRISY**, so we must make sure our actions are aligned with the internal transformation we claim to have received.
- (NEVER FORGET) – **THE NEED FOR FAITH (IS FOUNDATIONAL TO THE CHRISTIAN LIFE):** *‘Living by faith’* is more than following rules or showing up for activities at a local church. It is about a life that has been transformed and is yielded to the will of God.
- (HOW DO WE DO THIS?) **BY RE-EXAMINING WHAT WE CONSIDER IMPORTANT:** Baptism and communion are important because they point to deeper spiritual realities.
  - Elsewhere, PAUL often encourages us to examine ourselves to determine if we are relying on external things that are only symbolic of a deeper commitment to God.
  - Though baptism and communion are not in conflict with a pure faith, neither are they substitutes for submission to the will of God.
- (AND FINALLY, WE MUST BE CLEAR ABOUT) **JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION:** **ROMANS 2:17-29** emphasizes that **JUSTIFICATION** is not achieved by outward actions but by inward transformation.
  - This transformation should do more than lead us to change our external behavioral patterns; it is a call to inward transformation and renewal.

Finally, this chapter should guide us toward self-examination, and I hope as we traverse the rest of this great treatise, we will find ourselves changed inwardly by the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>3</sup> Deuteronomy 10:16

<sup>4</sup> Deuteronomy 30:6