

# The Gospel According To Paul: Romans

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## **The Guilt of the Jews (2:1-3:20)**

***There Is No Respect of Persons with God  
(2:1-16)***

Paul continues his discussion of the guilt of the whole of mankind and their lost or destroyed condition before God. In 1:18-32 he specifically addressed the guilt of the Gentiles. Here in the following verses (2:1-3:20) Paul moves to the guilt of the Jews.

### **Paul's Use of Diatribe**

Here in these verses (2:1ff) is introduced a stylistic device, often used by Paul, called "diatribe." Diatribe derives from a Greek word meaning to go back and forth as in conversation or debate. This method of argumentation is found in philosophical writings of the first century Hellenistic world, but it is also common in Jewish argumentation, especially in rabbinic literature. In the diatribe the writer addresses an imaginary opponent, critic, or student in a running discourse or question and answer format. In this way the writer develops his arguments by raising and addressing questions or criticism the reader might raise if he were engaged in a one on one discussion with the writer.

The imaginary opponent here is the Jewish reader who would fully agree with what Paul has said in 1:18-2:8. The Gentiles were in need of deliverance from the power of sin and needed a redeemer or savior who would deliver them from the powers of darkness and bring them into the

light. Paul's message to his imaginary Jewish opponent is: you too are in darkness and enslaved to the power of sin. The Jew is no different than the Gentile in terms of the enslaving power of sin.

In the opening lines of this text it is not clear that Paul is addressing the Jews. He speaks very generically, "*You, therefore, whoever you are (Lit. "you, O man,") you have no excuse.*" It is not until 2:9, that it becomes apparent that he is addressing the Jews.

Paul begins in 2:1ff, by speaking generically, as though he is addressing anyone and everyone who stands under the judgment of God. Then, in a very effective way, he moves his Jewish reader into a position where he realizes that Paul is speaking to him. Somewhat as Nathan did with David when he confronted him with his sin with Bathsheba (2 Sam 12:1-10 - "Thou art the man").

### **All Men Are Guilty**

#### ***He Is Speaking to "You, Whoever You Are!" (2:1-8)***

Keep in mind the point Paul wishes to establish here, "all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin" (3:9). He begins with "everyone."

*You have no excuse, O man (Anthropos), you who pass judgment on someone else, for in whatever thing, you judge others, you are condemning yourself, because you, the one doing the judging, you do the same things. Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere man (O Anthropos), pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. God "will give to each person according to what he has done." (Psalm 62:12; Prov 24:12) To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil there will be wrath and anger.*

***He Is Speaking To the Jews Too!***  
**(1:9-16)**

*There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Greek; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Greek. For God does not show favoritism (prosopolepsia – to receive the face, respect of persons) with God. <sup>12</sup>All who sin apart from the law (the Gentiles) will also perish apart from the law and all who sin under the law (the Jews) will be judged by the law. For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.*

**The Commonwealth of Israel**

The Jews thought themselves to be exempt from the judgment of God the way that the Gentile world would be judged. The Jewish religion was a nationalistic religion. They viewed themselves as a corporate entity; i.e., the people of God as a nation - the children of Israel. They did not see themselves individually; rather, they were part of a whole. The Jews believed that they would be delivered "as a people or nation," not as individuals. When God sent the Messiah he would deliver "the people of God" (all of them) from their oppression. If a Jew was unfaithful or sinful, his repentance or contrition would only bring "coverage" until *Yom Kippur* (the Day of Atonement), at which time confession of sin, repentance, and sin offerings were made for the whole nation of Israel, in Palestine and in the Diaspora.

In the eyes of a Jewish Christians, a Gentile who wished to become a Christian had to first become a part of the commonwealth of Israel in order to receive the Messianic deliverance promised Israel when the wrath of God came upon the pagan world. This was one of the major areas of controversy between Paul and the Judaizers. They were convinced that a Gentile had to first become a Jew in order to become a follower of Christ, else he could not be a part of the national redemption to be ushered in by the return of Christ.

**The Messianic Hope of Judaism**

The Jewish concept of "Messianic deliverance: is very important to our understanding of what is going on here. Among the Jews of Palestine

the longing for the Messiah was rooted in this concept of nationalistic deliverance. Among many of the Jews of the first century Mediterranean world, the Messiah they longed for would be an otherworldly Messiah who would effect an apocalyptic conquest of the world, establish himself as the world ruler, and restore the kingdom of God “to Israel.” This theme is found throughout the writings of Apocalyptic Judaism of the first century period. 1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch, 2 (Syriac Apocalypse of) Baruch, 4 Ezra, and even the Dead Sea Scrolls. All these writings portray a widespread belief that the coming of the Messiah would bring about a worldwide conquest in which the Gentiles would be deposed of power and the Jewish people would be given rule over the earth.

It is possible that many Jewish Christians believed that Jesus of Nazareth was this Messiah and expected that he was soon to return to the earth, overthrow Rome, and establish the kingdom of God in all the earth. The “kingdom of God,” however, would be an ushering in of the restored Davidic kingdom, with the Messiah, the Son of David, ruling over all nations of the earth.

### **Paul’s Messiah Was the Savior of the World Not just Israel’s Deliverer**

To Paul, Jesus of Nazareth was truly the Messiah of all messianic prophecies found in the Hebrew Scriptures. The difference between Paul's belief and that of many of his Jewish brethren was that Jesus came into this world to deliver, not just Israel, but the whole of mankind.

This deliverance was not just the deliverance of Israel from enslavement to Rome but deliverance of the human race from the powers of darkness. The Messiah in whom Paul believed came into this world, not to conquer Caesar, but to conquer Caesar's lord! Satan wasn't just the adversary of Israel, he was the adversary of the whole of mankind.

### **Conclusion**

At this point in this text (2:1-11), it is apparent that Paul is addressing the Jews in this diatribe, “You, whoever you are, who judges others.” With this understanding, re-read this text with a view the Jewish reader.

*You, therefore, whoever you are (**Jews and Gentiles alike**), you have no excuse, you who pass judgment (**the Jew**) on someone else (**the Greeks**), for in what you judge others for, you are condemning yourself, because you, the one doing the judging (**the Jews**), do the same things. Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things (**Jews and Gentiles alike**) is based on truth. So when you, a mere man (**a Jewish man**), pass judgment on **them** (i.e., **the Greeks who violate the moral character intrinsic within them**) and yet do the same things (**violate the moral codes of the Torah**), do you think you will escape God's judgment? Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance, and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance? (What he is saying here is that God's kindness, forbearance, and longsuffering are not to be understood as benefits of being a part of corporate Israel, (wherein God overlooks their sins until the next Yom Kippur), but are manifestations of God's goodness which gives you the opportunity to repent of your sins. God's delay in bringing justice on the sinner does not mean that he will not come upon them in death or the last days.) God "will give to each person (**Jew and Gentile alike**) according to what he has done." (Psalm 62:12;Prov 24:12) To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life (**Jew and Gentile alike**). But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil (**Jew and Gentile alike**), there will be wrath and anger. God "will give to each person (**each individual Jew and each individual Greek**) according to what he has done" (**no corporate redemption here**). To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil (**both Jew and Gentile alike**) there will be wrath and anger. (2:1-8)*

### **Application: Putting Yourself in the Story**

What of those who think their sinful behavior is excusable (or covered) because they are, "members of the church," a part of the community of believers, they go to church every time the doors are open, and have been faithful Christians all their lives? Paul would say, "Your sins are just as sinful as anybody else's – no corporate redemption here either!" You can't behave like a sinner (especially the way you treat others) and make claims that your behavior is acceptable because you are a saint of God,

you are a member of the church. We will all be held accountable for the way we behave if we do not change our minds (*metanoeo* - *repentance*), turn from those behaviors we have given ourselves permission to engage in, and turn to God for help! There is grace, but it is not an insurance policy that gives one unlimited coverage for his sinful behavior; which is the issue he addresses in 6:1ff). He continues in verse 9-16,

*There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for **the Jew**, then for **the Gentile**; but glory, honor and peace for **everyone** who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism (no respect of persons with God). All who sin apart from the law (**the Gentiles**) will also perish apart from the law (being judged by the moral character of God intrinsic within them as beings created in the image of God), and all who sin under the law (**the Jews**) will be judged by the law (by the moral/ethical codes of the Torah). For it is not those who hear the law (from the front row seats in the synagogue) who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law (whose moral character reflects their identity as beings created in the image of God) who will be declared righteous. Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law (the Torah was not given to them), do by nature things required by the law (e.g., the moral teaching of the Torah), they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law (the moral instructions written in the Torah) are written on their hearts (the reflection of the moral character intrinsic within everyone created in the image of God) their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing (when they've done that which is morally wrong), now even defending them (when they have done what is morally right). This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets (God can read the thoughts of your heart) through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares (to Paul the lordship of Christ was the moral paradigm by which the human race will be judged).*

Paul, no matter where he goes with his reasoning or argumentation, always come back to the same place, *and there stands Jesus!*

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