

## 2 Human unfaithfulness (Romans 1:17–2:29)

Last time we met the Christians in Rome and considered why Paul sent this letter to them. We read the opening section where Paul identified himself as *a servant of King Jesus*, commissioned to deliver *God's gospel*—the good news that God raised up his Son, enthroning him in power over all people (verses 1-4). This good news calls the nations to obey King Jesus out of allegiance to him. Whether our family background is Jewish or gentile, we're all God's chosen and holy people in the Messiah (verses 5-7).

Any questions on last week before we continue?

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### 2.1 Faithfulness and righteousness

After discussing his relationship with his audience (verses 8-15), Paul gives them the essence of the whole letter:

#### Romans 1:16-17 (NIV)

<sup>16</sup> For I am not ashamed of the **gospel**, because it is the power of God that brings **salvation** to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. <sup>17</sup> For in the **gospel** the **righteousness** of God is revealed—a **righteousness** that is by **faith** from first to last, just as it is written: "The **righteous** will live by **faith**."

The keywords of the letter are all here: **gospel**, **salvation**, **faith**, and **righteous**.

Reading these verses feels a bit like seeing a container ship sail into Fremantle harbour. Each word holds an entire container load of freight—freight Paul unpacks in the coming chapters.

But the words are not isolated containers. When unpacked, the freight these words carry fits together to build something bigger than any of them. The relationship between *gospel*, *salvation*, *faith* and *righteousness* is what matters, because we live in that relationship.



We discussed the meaning of *gospel* and *salvation*:

- **Gospel:** God's good news decree that enthroned his Son as our Lord by raising him from the dead.
- **Salvation:** the rescue of a world dominated by sin and death, into God's reign in Christ.

The other two words have a range of meanings:

- **Faith** (*pistis*) is more than **having** faith; it's **keeping** faith as well. It's *faith and faithfulness*: our *faith* in Christ and our *faithfulness* to Christ. That's important because Paul uses this word for God's *faithfulness* to us too (Romans 3:3).
- **Righteous** (*dikaios*) is also a relational word. It can mean **being** right or **doing** right. Being in right relationship, you do right by the other. It's also translated *just*, since doing what's right is acting justly (doing justice).

The relationship between *faith* and *righteousness* was at the heart of the Reformation. For Catholics, if people of the *Faith* had not *done right*, they must make amends. They must **confess** to a priest, who'd prescribe **penance**. Doing penance showed contrition (sorrow for your sin) and helped to make up for the wrong you'd done. The church gave you **absolution**, declaring you were no longer guilty of that offence.

Martin Luther said no! Forgiveness does not come from any works we do, including penance. We don't make up for being bad by doing good. A righteous status cannot be earned. It's a gift from God on the basis of faith, not works. We're justified (declared righteous) by faith alone.

For some Catholics today, it's obvious that God justifies by faith, that we never earn our standing with God. Others still talk about merit: Mary and the saints have a surplus of good over bad, so we can draw on their righteousness to make up for our deficit.

When Paul wrote Romans, he was not in that bunfight. Paul was not fighting against the church's abuse of power in the Middle Ages as Luther was. Yes, Scripture applies to the struggles of all generations, but this wasn't what Paul was addressing.

So what was Paul saying about the relationship between faith[fulness] (*pistis*) and righteousness/justification (*dikaios*)? In verse 17 Paul quotes a text that uses these words. It provides the background for how Paul was thinking.

Habakkuk complained that God needed to confront the unfaithfulness of his people since the wicked were overpowering the righteous (Habakkuk 1:4). The LORD agreed: he said he'd hand his people over to Babylon (1:6). Habakkuk complained that having Babylon in charge didn't solve anything: they were even worse (1:12-17).

#### **Habakkuk 2:2-5 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> And the LORD answered me: "Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it. ...

<sup>4</sup> "Behold, his [Babylon's] soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but **the righteous shall live by his faith.**

<sup>5</sup> ... His greed is as wide as Sheol; like death he has never enough. He gathers for himself all nations and collects as his own all peoples."

Yes, Babylon was full of twisted pride (verse 4a), driven by the power of death to take all nations into its grasp (verse 5). That's why the LORD told Habakkuk to issue a very plain warning, so anyone who read it could escape (verse 2). Anyone who *believed* it would do the *right* thing: *run!*

Habakkuk 2:4 is all about the connection between faith[fulness] and right[eousness]. As a Jewish translation says, *The righteous man is rewarded with life for his fidelity.*<sup>12</sup> They'd save their **life** by doing the **right** thing **out of faith[fulness] to God**, while those who were doing the wrong thing (not faithful to God) would lose their lives.

There are two sides to our relationship with God, a mirror between heaven and earth. Out of faith[fulness] toward us, God did right in providing Christ to rescue us. Out of faith[fulness] to God, we're called to do right by him as we come to life in Christ.

What God has done in Christ is good news for us all, the Jewish people and the nations (Romans 1:1-15). The gospel is the reign of God (the power of God) restored to the earth in the resurrected Christ. It rescues all who respond with faith[fulness] to God's authority. It saves the world, for out of *faith[fulness]* to God we are enabled to do *right*.

What God has done for us in Christ is how he calls us to respond:

- Out of *faith[fulness]* to us, God does *right*.
- Out of *faith[fulness]* to God, we do *right*.

The point of Romans 1–3 is that, even though humans have done wrong by God, God does right by us. God-doing-right (the righteousness of God) is demonstrated in providing Christ to reconcile us to himself. This gospel calls us to faith[fulness] to God. Out of faith[fulness] to God, we then do right because we're set right. As we'll see next week, that's the joyful culmination of this entire section (Romans 3:21-26).

So, here's an expanded interpretation of the summary statement of the letter:

**Romans 1:17 (expanded)**

**For in the gospel** [the good news that God has raised up his Son as our Lord], **the righteousness of God** [God doing right by a world that did not do right by him] **is revealed** [so we now see in Christ how God uses his power to rescue us], **from faith to faith** [starting with of God's faithfulness to us, leading to our faithfulness to God], **as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith"** [God always intended to set things right through a relationship of faithfulness, as Scripture says].

What are your thoughts on the relationship between *faith[fulness]* and *right[eousness]*?

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<sup>12</sup> Jewish Publication Society, *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1985), Hab 2:4.

## 2.2 The unfaithfulness of the nations (Romans 1:18-32)

Paul affirmed the righteousness of God revealed in Christ (i.e. God doing right out of his faithfulness to humanity). Now Paul turns to our side of the relationship: humanity's unfaithfulness means we have not done right by God. That's true of both the nations (1:18-32) and also the nation to whom God revealed his Law (2:1–3:20).

Even before God called Abraham (Genesis 12), kingdoms were trying to take God's power into human hands (Genesis 11) because the nations had gone their own way (Genesis 10). That's the reason there's so much war and injustice in the world:

### Romans 1:18-20 (NIV)

<sup>18</sup> The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, <sup>19</sup> since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. <sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

The problem is *godlessness*, a lack of respect for God's authority. Without faithful commitment to God, people don't do right. *Adikia* (translated *wickedness* in verse 18) literally means "not right" (the opposite of *dikaiois*). When people don't do right, they're not being true to God (verse 18).

The suppressed truth is that **God is known in human beings**. That's who we are: creatures who image God. In the likeness of his divine nature God created us, entrusting to us his enduring dominion over the earth (Genesis 1:26-28). In suppressing this glorious display of God's majesty (Psalm 8), humanity falls short of the glory of God we were destined to carry (Romans 3:23).

God is angry that we're preventing creation from experiencing his management as he intends. Our relationships with each other and with creation are marred with conflict and death, preoccupied with our own might instead of partnering with God (Genesis 3–6). We reflect a failure of divine management, for which there's no excuse.

And once people don't recognize God's image in themselves, they create images of imagined gods from things that are not the Creator but merely part of the creation:

### Romans 1:21-23 (NIV)

<sup>21</sup> For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup> Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools <sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

For the Jewish believers at Rome, these were the primary commandments of their heritage: no other gods, no images of created things (Exodus 20:1-4).

Greek believers were just as proud of their heritage, the wisdom of philosophers like Aristotle and Plato. But they've missed the whole point of being human if they don't recognize our vocation to image God to creation instead of creating futile images. It's foolish to worship images that are not God.



Household gods of the Roman world

What gods do Australians bow to when we don't recognize God?

God's gospel—the good news that he raised his Son from tomb to throne—undoes the wisdom of the powerful who worship themselves or other gods. That's the point Paul made when he wrote to Corinth in southern Greece (1 Corinthians 1:18-25).

Unfaithfulness to God is not a private religious error. It's a failure to be human, a misuse of the bodies God gave us:

#### **Romans 1:24-27 (NIV)**

<sup>24</sup> Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.

<sup>25</sup> They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

<sup>26</sup> Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. <sup>27</sup> In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

Our society teaches, "Your body belongs to you." If we own ourselves, non-consensual sex is wrong, but anything consenting adults do is okay. But if you believe that everything in creation—including your body—belongs to God, that's not okay.

Our bodies are temples where God lives. Your body does not belong to you; God decides what you can do with it. As Paul told the Greeks at Corinth:

#### **1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (NIV)**

<sup>19</sup> Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;

<sup>20</sup> you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your bodies.

But if you see yourself as a god who owns your own body, you can do whatever you like with it—using as many sex partners as you want. Faithfulness to one partner means nothing. And while you're at it, why limit yourself to only half the people in the world? Faithfulness to God as the Creator who made us male and female means nothing to those who see themselves as self-owned.

And that's the point. It's out of faithfulness (*pistis*) to God that we do right (*dikaios*), and it's out of unfaithfulness (*apistia*) to God that humanity does wrong (*adikia*).

The problem begins with discarding the knowledge of God:

**Romans 1:28-32 (NIV)**

<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. <sup>29</sup> They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, <sup>30</sup> slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; <sup>31</sup> they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. <sup>32</sup> Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

In discarding God, we make ourselves the source of truth and justice. We will then do whatever it takes to get what we want. "Whatever it takes" includes things God outlaws, so we end up *filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, and malice* (verse 29 ESV).

Remember Cain? By rejecting the one who has the knowledge of good and evil, Cain opened himself up to being ruled by another power:

**Genesis 4:6-7 (NIV)**

<sup>6</sup> Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? <sup>7</sup> If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it."

Cain became Exhibit A of someone *full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness*. (verse 29). He was the first to go out from the presence of God, to build a city that relied on violence and murder to get justice (Genesis 4:16-24). All the evils named in verses 30-32 spring from rejecting God's authority and therefore ceasing to reflect God's heart.

Your thoughts on what Romans 1:18-32 says about the nations?

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## 2.3 The unfaithfulness of God's nation (Romans 2)

Who is Paul addressing?

### ***The judge (2:1-11)***

Remember, the pastoral issue of this letter is the conflict between the Jewish Christians who started the house churches in Rome and the gentile Christians who had been running the churches since Emperor Claudius expelled the Jews.

Now Jews were returning to Rome, and the Jewish Christians were not happy with how gentiles had been running the church—without the proper respect for and compliance with Torah. They were thrilled to hear Paul denouncing the gentiles in the same way we read in other Jewish literature such as [Wisdom of Solomon 14:22-26](#).

But Paul has not been speaking **to** gentiles; he's been speaking **about** them. Everything he said was in the third person: *they, them*. Now in Romans 2:1, Paul switches to the second person (*you*), and we realize who he's speaking to:

#### **Romans 2:1 (NIV)**

**You**, therefore, have no excuse, **you** who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point **you** judge another, **you** are condemning **yourself**, because **you** who pass judgment do the same things.

Ouch! The whole diatribe against gentiles was a setup! He's addressing Jewish Christians who do not see gentiles as *loved by God and called his holy people* (1:7). They sit in judgement of gentiles. In doing so, they are also dethroning God, for judgement belongs to God alone:

#### **Romans 2:2-3 (NIV)**

<sup>2</sup> Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. <sup>3</sup> So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment?

Paul is calling the Jewish Christians to climb off their own thrones and leave judgement to God. The fact that we do not judge as God does is evidence that we do not have God's heart. In setting ourselves up as judges, we're showing contempt for the true judge and his purposes:

#### **Romans 2:4 (NIV)**

Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

God's judgement is unlike human judgement. When Cain killed Abel, the family wanted Cain to get what he had given, but God—the true judge—would not give them satisfaction. He protected Cain from their vengeance (Genesis 4:15). Cain did not repent, but God gave him another chance, just as he did before the crime (4:6-7).

When the nations went their way, God did not force them into submission the way human rulers do (Genesis 10). God initiated a project to rescue them (Genesis 12:1-3).

The way God rules does not satisfy human judgement. God's heart is to turn us around and lead us home.

But let's not set ourselves up as judges of the Jewish people. For 2000 years, the church has been just as judgemental. Our judgementalism—our determination to take over and rule others out when they don't agree with our view—is the problem God has to deal with.

### **Romans 2:5-6 (NIV)**

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> God "will repay each person according to what they have done."

The quotation comes from Psalm 62 where God's Anointed faced people who *intended to topple God from his lofty place* (verse 4). David concluded:

### **Psalm 62:11-12 (NIV)**

<sup>11</sup> One thing God has spoken, two things I have heard:

"Power belongs to you, God, <sup>12</sup> and with you, Lord, is unfailing love"; and, "You reward everyone according to what they have done."

God reigns with the perfect combination of justice and faithful covenant love (*hě·sěđ*). In the end, everyone is evaluated on the basis of whether they have done what God called them to do. And God calls for *the obedience that comes from faith[fulness]* (1:5). God does right out of his faithfulness to us, and God rewards with life those who do right out of faith[fulness] to him (1:17).

### **Romans 2:7-8 (NIV)**

<sup>7</sup> To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honour and immortality, he will give eternal life. <sup>8</sup> But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.

God is pleased with those who live for his honour, leaving judgement to his majestic throne. God is angry with those who reject the truth of God's authority, following the path of evil that has tried to take God's power into our hands since the beginning.

Paul's rant against gentiles began by declaring God's anger against them (1:18). Old Testament prophets sometimes denounced the nations (e.g. Isaiah 14–23), but their message primarily revealed God's displeasure with his own nation. God's judgement has always started with the people called to represent his authority:

### **Romans 2:9-11 (NIV)**

<sup>9</sup> There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; <sup>10</sup> but glory, honour and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

<sup>11</sup> For God does not show favouritism.

It would be foolish for Jewish Christians at Rome to set themselves up as judges of the gentiles. If they want to be first, God will judge them first, just like the Messiah said (Matthew 7:1-2).

It's not that God will judge Jews more harshly than gentiles, or vice versa. God does not show favour to one group over another (verse 11). All—Jewish and gentile—are *loved by God and called to be his holy people* (1:7). All are priests, called to offer their bodies to God as a living sacrifice (12:1). The goal of this letter is that the gentiles—along with the Jewish people who had the prophetic writings before them—might come into *the obedience that comes from faith[fulness]* to the only wise ruler of all peoples through Messiah Jesus (Romans 16:25-27). God gave his revelation to Israel first, but God does not show favouritism for Jews over gentiles.

### **Returning judgement to God (2:12-16)**

Paul reinforces the point that judgement belongs in God's hands (not ours) and God's judgement is not based on partiality to either group:

#### **Romans 2:12-13 (NIV)**

<sup>12</sup> All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law.

<sup>13</sup> 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.

Israel received the Torah (Law) that revealed God's will for them. Although people of the other nations did not have the Torah, they still had some awareness of right and wrong, so God judges them on what they did know.

#### **Romans 2:14-15 (NIV)**

<sup>14</sup> Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. <sup>15</sup> They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.

The concept of *righteous* gentiles is foreign to Christian theology. Haven't we all sinned (as Paul says in the next chapter)? Don't we all need God's salvation through Christ? Yes, but when we leave judgement to God we're not in the business of condemning people in order to get them saved. That's what the church has often done, but it's not the gospel according to Jesus and it's not Paul's message.

Pharaoh's daughter might be an example of a gentile *doing right*. Her father ordered the death of the Hebrew boys, but she rescued baby Moses when she found him hidden in a basket in the reeds of the Nile (Exodus 2:5-10). While conscience is an imperfect guide, she knew what was right, and she did it.

In the grounds of the World Holocaust Remembrance Centre today there's a garden to honour



"Garden of the Righteous" at World Holocaust Remembrance Centre (Yad Vashem) in Jerusalem. Photo by Allen Browne, 2017.

people of other nations who did right by Jews when Hitler made that a crime. The “Garden of the Righteous” is a Jewish tribute to righteous gentiles.

In the end, only God knows who is righteous:

**Romans 2:16 (NIV)**

<sup>16</sup> This will take place on the day when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

When we judge each other, we don't know people's motives, and we don't know if they'll change their mind later. God waits until it's all clear. The only human to whom he entrusts judgement is Messiah Jesus. But even as the human judges condemned him, he prayed, “Father, forgive them” (Luke 23:34). *You therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgement on someone else* (verse 1).

**Jewish unfaithfulness (2:17-28)**

Paul identifies the “you” he's speaking to. It's a Jewish Christian who views himself as part of the privileged people to whom God gave the Torah, and who feels justified in condemning gentile Christians for not living by the Torah's regulations:

**Romans 2:17-24 (NIV)**

<sup>17</sup> Now you [singular], if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and boast in God; <sup>18</sup> if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; <sup>19</sup> if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, <sup>20</sup> an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of little children, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth—  
<sup>21</sup> you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? <sup>22</sup> You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? <sup>23</sup> You who boast in the law, do you dishonour God by breaking the law? <sup>24</sup> As it is written: “God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you [plural].”

The quotation in verse 24 is from Isaiah 52:5. The whole of Isaiah 40–55 makes the point Paul is making here: God called Israel to be his people, to represent him to the nations. Israel was unfaithful to God and his calling, but God remained faithful to them—saving them and reaching the nations through them. For example:

**Isaiah 42:6-7, 17-19 (NIV)**

<sup>6</sup> “I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, <sup>7</sup> to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness. ... <sup>17</sup> “But those who trust in idols, who say to images, ‘You are our gods,’ will be turned back in utter shame. <sup>18</sup> “Hear, you deaf; look, you blind, and see! <sup>19</sup> Who is blind but my servant, and deaf like the messenger I send? Who is blind like the one in covenant with me, blind like the servant of the LORD?”

Isaiah was speaking of the exile, when God's people were so disobedient that he handed them over to Babylon. A *blind* and *deaf* witness offers no evidence of God's sovereign authority (Isaiah 43), leaving Babylon to believe its idols were more powerful (Isaiah 46). That's how they had brought blasphemy on God's name.

Now in the first century, Jews in Rome had also dishonoured God's name. Caesar's decree to expel the Jews from Rome was politically motivated, but God's name was being blasphemed among the gentiles because of them.

Paul's point is that even though the Jewish people had all the advantages of the covenant relationship (verses 17-20), their unfaithfulness to the covenant dishonoured God's name (verses 21-24). Out of unfaithfulness to God they did wrong by God.

So, who are God's covenant people? Four boundary markers distinguished Jews from others: circumcision, observing the sabbath and priestly laws, kosher food laws, and ethnicity.<sup>13</sup> For Paul, the marker of God's people is faith[fulness] to Christ which leads us to do right by God:

- a) Ethnicity no longer marks the covenant people, for in Christ *all* (Jews and gentiles) *are loved by God and called to be his holy people* (1:7).
- b) Kosher food laws cannot divide those who are in Christ (Romans 14–15).
- c) Jews and gentiles together are priests offering sacrifices to God (12:1).
- d) Circumcision is no longer the identifying mark of God's people:

#### **Romans 2:25-29 (NIV)**

<sup>25</sup> Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. <sup>26</sup> So then, if those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? <sup>27</sup> The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker.

<sup>28</sup> A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. <sup>29</sup> No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God.

The point of circumcision for Israel was covenant commitment. But if they were unfaithful to the covenant, circumcision was meaningless. The prophets spoke of those who were uncircumcised in heart (Jeremiah 9:26; Ezekiel 44:9).

The sign of the covenant people is no longer whether someone is physically circumcised or not. Verse 29 states what Paul will spell out in Romans 8, that the sign of the covenant people is now the Holy Spirit bringing people into God's family as sons because they share in the sonship of the Messiah. The regenerative work of the Spirit is the marker of those who are the people of God, the kingdom of the Messiah.

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<sup>13</sup> N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, (London: SPCK, 1992), 237-241.

## 2.4 So what?

That’s why it was so damaging for Jewish Christians at Rome to set themselves up as judges of their gentile brothers and sisters. They were trying to overrule God. They were judging by wrong standards—the standards of the Torah covenant, rather than the standards of the new covenant established in Christ and the Spirit.

Looking back at Chapter 1, we can see how Paul’s diatribe about the nations was setting up for his warning against judging in Chapter 2. Some of the phrases he used to condemn gentiles were phrases the Old Testament applied to Israel.

For example, the nations *exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images* (1:23). Israel did that too, even before they left Mount Sinai: *At Horeb they made a calf and worshiped an idol cast from metal. They exchanged their glorious God for an image of a bull, which eats grass* (Psalm 106:19-20).

Because the nations were unfaithful to God, *God handed them over* to their own desires (1:24). And that’s why Israel went into exile: *Because they were unfaithful to me, I ... handed them over to their enemies* (Ezekiel 39:23).

Paul’s point is judgement belongs in God’s hands. Consequently, a Jew who sets himself up as the judge of gentiles is doing exactly what the gentiles have done—taking into his own hands authority that belongs to God.

So what are the implications of Romans 2 for today?

In what ways do we set ourselves up as judges of other Christians or of people we judge as “non-Christians”? What do we need to change in order to return the throne to God instead of setting ourselves as judges in his place?

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For next time, **read Romans 3**. See how faith[fulness] is the foundation for right[eousness], both in how God rescues us from our unfaithfulness and in how we respond to God:

- a) Out of unfaithfulness to God, humanity did wrong by God.
- b) Out of faithfulness to us, God did right by us in providing the Messiah.
- c) Out of faithfulness to the Messiah, humanity is set right and does right (righteousness) by God.

That’s good news.