

Script: Pastor Frank R. Johnson

Romans: Good News for the World

Why Good, Church-going People Need to Be Saved

Romans 2:1-16

Take a first look.

I. EVERYONE KNOWS THAT MURDERERS, RAPISTS, DRUG-DEALERS, THOSE WHO CHEAT ON THEIR SPOUSES—all need to change their lives. They need to repent of the badness of their ways. They need to be rescued from those evil lifestyles. They need to be saved!

II. BUT WHAT ABOUT THE GOOD, CHURCH-GOING PEOPLE? What about the people who have never murdered, never committed rape, never cheated on their marriage promises? What about the person who votes and who writes letters to members of Congress, who is successful in business and an upstanding member of the community?

III. CONSIDER A “GOOD PERSON” who needed a work of God in his life, but didn’t think he did: Luke 18:9-14.

^{ESV} **Luke 18:9-14** [Jesus] also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ¹⁰ “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ ¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

So what was the problem here? Why wasn’t this Pharisee a truly justified person? He was a member of the strictest religious sect among the Jews. We all would have considered him a good, church-going person. You will notice that this is not a parable about *prayer*. Jesus Himself drew the moral. It was a parable about *justification*, being in a right standing before God.

This man was morally upright, religiously zealous, and very scrupulous—and still lost! His heart attitude was keeping him from a life-giving relationship with God.

IV. Why did a good, church-going guy like that need to be rescued from his dangerous condition? Paul answers this question theologically in Romans 2. The answer lies in the nature of God’s judgment. We must beware if we think that we as moralists are “good enough” to be accepted by God without genuine repentance and faith in Jesus Christ!

Take a closer look at Romans 2:1-16.

I. WE ALL NEED TO BE SAVED BECAUSE GOD’S JUDGMENT IS UNIVERSAL. vv. 1-5

He will judge every person for sins of the spirit as well as those of the body.

1. *God is just as concerned with spiritual pride (as He is with sexual immorality).* He warns those “who pass judgment on someone else.” Spiritual pride is one of the Seven Deadly Sins because it is so subtle. It is the basis of all sin—putting oneself above all others, the only vantage point from which you think you can look down on them and pass judgment on them.

A—We must beware of such spiritual pride. We can never be reconciled with God and maintain such an attitude.

I—Rewind to the Pharisee praying in the temple. What was wrong with that picture? From the human standpoint, it was completely understandable. The Pharisee was a devout, selfless person who fasted twice a week and gave a tenth of all he received to God. He wasn't an evil person—an extortioner, an adulterer, a cheater. He truly was "not like other men." He would qualify for leadership in every church in America. The only problem with the man, from Jesus' standpoint, was that he was completely separated from God. He was not *justified*.

And then there was that embarrassing tax collector. Who let him into the temple anyway? What kind of game was he trying to play with God? Who was he really fooling, coming into the temple to pray? Everyone knew what he really was. Well, everyone thought they did. The only One Who really knew his true character was God. And according to the story: "*This man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.*"

I—A man named David McCasland told of being flagged down at an intersection by a woman in distress. Her car was stalled, the hood was up, and she told him she couldn't get it started. She said, "If you jiggle the wire on the battery, I think it will work." So he did, and the cable came off in his hand. He looked around and told her, "The terminal needs to be tightened. I can fix it if you have some tools." Her response was, "My husband says that all I need to do is to jiggle the wire. It always works. Why don't you just do that?" At first, he wondered why her husband didn't ride around town with her and jiggle the wire for her when her car wouldn't start. Then he said, "Ma'am, if I jiggle the wire, you're going to need someone else to do it every time you shut the engine off. If you'll give me two minutes and a wrench, we can solve the problem and you can forget about it."

Reluctantly, she fumbled under the front seat and then extended a crescent wrench through the window of her old car. As he was tightening the battery terminal, it occurred to him how many times he tried to get the "quick fix" from God. He wanted God to ride around with him and "jiggle the wire" when his life became stalled in some way. He wanted the symptoms to go away, but didn't want any drastic change of heart. It is too easy to arrange the deck chairs on the Titanic and not fix the gash in the hull!

2. *God is just as concerned with hypocrisy (as He is with murder).* Paul goes on, "Because you who pass judgment do the same things." It is clear that Jesus was harder on hypocrisy than He was on adultery: see Matthew 23:1-2. Adultery was more obvious, but hypocrisy was decidedly deadly. Why? Because the hypocrite is simply *an actor playing a role*—a role that he never intends to really live.

A—We must beware of a surface spirituality that is not a genuine work of God on the heart. The surface spirituality will cause us to think more of ourselves than is warranted by our true spiritual heart condition.

I—The late Don Shula¹ is the legendary coach of the Miami Dolphins football team for many years. He is the winningest coach in the history of the National Football League, with a record of 347–173–6 (.665), including playoff games. He led the 1972 Miami Dolphins to a complete season, the first and only team ever to win every game they played in a season, including the playoffs and the Super Bowl. He was enshrined in the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1997. He was well-known for his humility, but one day it slipped. He and his wife had retreated to a small town in Maine to avoid being noticed on their vacation. While they were there, they went to see a movie on a messy, rainy night. When Shula and his wife walked into the theater the people began to applaud. The famous coach whispered to his wife, "I guess there's no place we can go where people won't

¹ 1930-2020.

recognize me.” When they sat down, Shula shook hands with the man on their row and said, “I’m surprised that you knew who I am.” The man looked at him and replied, “Am I supposed to know who you are? We’re just glad you came in because the manager said he wasn’t going to start the movie unless there were at least ten people here.” Awkward! Recognition is no sign of spiritual maturity; instead, it may be a detriment to it.

3. *God is just as concerned with stubbornness (as He is with cruelty).* Paul confronts the moralist with “stubbornness” and an “unrepentant heart.” “A stubborn and unrepentant heart” is the description of a determined resistance to the will of God and a commitment to seeking one’s own will no matter what.

A—This is very dangerous indeed. Paul says that this is “storing up wrath” for the day of judgment.

I—George Michael, a well-known pop singer on the nineties, was arrested several years ago in Beverly Hills for lewd conduct in a park area known as a meeting spot for homosexuals. The 34-year-old British-born singer acknowledged his homosexuality during an interview with CNN: “I don’t feel any shame whatsoever.”²

Jeremiah warned those whom, he said, “don’t even know how to blush” (**Jeremiah 6:15, NIV**):

“Are they ashamed of their detestable conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush. So they will fall among the fallen; they will be brought down when I punish them,” says the LORD” (Jeremiah 6:15 NIV).

I—Think of this: which is worse, malignant melanoma (an aggressive cancer manifesting in the skin) or hardening of the arteries? This is a trick question, I admit. One is visible (melanoma) and the other is not, but both will kill us.

We must learn how to be ashamed about such ungodly attitudes as criticism, lust, greed, apathy, self-reliance in conflict with the God-dependency necessary for eternal life to flourish. Spiritual pride, hypocrisy, and stubbornness will kill us!

“How shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation?” (Hebrews 2:2, NIV).

II. WE ALL NEED TO BE SAVED BECAUSE GOD’S JUDGMENT IS IMPARTIAL. vv. 6-11

1. *“God does not show favoritism” (v. 11).* As Paul will make clear in this chapter and the next, everyone *can* be saved because everyone *needs* to be saved.

2. *The universal opportunity of salvation confirms the universal necessity of it.* Chronologically, it was made available to the Jews first and then to the rest of the world, the Gentiles. It was made available because it is a universal need.

3. *The evidence of saving faith will be impartially weighed.*

a. Evidence for:

- (1) Persistence in doing good
- (2) Seeking glory, honor, and immortality—or, a desire to please God above

all else

b. Evidence against:

- (1) Self-seeking
- (2) Rejecting the truth
- (3) Following evil

² *In Other Words*, Spring, 1998, p. 15.

A—We must realize that no matter what our race, our social standing in the community, our level of income, or our past experiences, we need God's salvation. We are under God's impartial scrutiny and we should live like it.

I—It was in 1990 or 1991 that a man named Ivan McGuire died at the age of 35. He was quite healthy; he was not depressed; he was not murdered. He jumped out of a plane with filming equipment to catch the excitement of other skydivers plummeting toward the earth. He was a veteran of over 800 jumps, but on this fateful day, he forgot to put on his parachute. It was his last jump.

You see, gravity is impartial. It doesn't matter how many times he had defied it before with that parachute; that one time he failed, and it killed him.

You see, the requirements of God are not graded on the curve. They are not a matter of comparison with how well others are doing. They are completely objective. Only 100% passes. No one is auditing the course of life, either. All must take the final test.

III. WE ALL NEED TO BE SAVED BECAUSE GOD'S JUDGMENT IS ACCORDING TO THE LIGHT GIVEN. Vv. 12-15

1. *We have the light of special revelation.* We have God's law in written form, in black and white before us. Sin under the law is judged. It is the doer of the law who is let off, not just the hearer. But we must ask ourselves, is it really possible to make 100% on such a test as the moral law of God?

2. *We have the light of general revelation.* There are two aspects to this general revelation.

a. **Nature:** 1:19-20

b. **Conscience:** 2:14-15. Here again, though sometimes our consciences do excuse us, is it really possible for a human being to follow his conscience fully? Is anyone every fully "excused" by his conscience?

A—We must admit that we are without excuse, both before the Law of God and before our consciences.

I—Even the small things can take us out of the race. That is what happened to Mario Andretti in May of 1987. He was dominating the Indianapolis 500 auto race as no one had in 50 years. He was ahead for 170 of 177 laps. He held an entire one-lap lead with only one lap to go. But then, the 47-year-old driver's quest for a second Indy victory was snuffed in a puff of fuel. A small part of the fuel system went out on his car and before it could be fixed, he was no longer in the lead.

It doesn't take much to bring us down. The standards are high—complete holiness and moral perfection.

God's tests are only over the material covered—only based on the light received—but it takes 100% to pass! We, too, are "without excuse."

IV. WE NEED TO BE SAVED BECAUSE GOD'S JUDGMENT IS ACCORDING TO JESUS CHRIST. v. 16

1. *Paul says, "God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ."* This means that the writer of Hebrews was right again (Hebrews 4:13, NIV): "*Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*"

2. *Jesus is God's fullest revelation of Himself (see John 1:17-18; Hebrews 1:1-4).* More clearly than the Old Testament law, more clearly than the individual conscience, the person of Jesus

Christ shows us what God is like and what humanity is meant to be. He is the new standard for humanity.

3. *Jesus is God's Middle-man in redeeming humanity (see 1 Timothy 2:3-4)*. As Paul writes to his younger partner in ministry: "There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

A—We will ultimately be confronted with the claims of Jesus Christ: What will we do, what have we done with Him? What difference will it make in us?

I—Near the end of a provocative and enlightening book on the psychology of atheism, Dr. Paul Vitz presents a chapter that recounts his own progress from a “wishy-washy Christian upbringing” (his words) to an adopted posture of atheism and finally back again to a position of serious Christian conviction. The name of the book, to which I have referred in the past, is *Faith of the Fatherless: The Psychology of Atheism*.³ It explores the influence of fathers on the religious belief or lack thereof of children, and especially sons. He told much of his own story in Part 2 of the book under the chapter title, “Superficial Atheism: A Personal Account.” He tells how he grew up with a smattering of Christian influence but that it wasn’t really very serious. As a student of psychology, atheism was supported by teachers and books. Though the psychological theories he was learning were all in conflict, the proponents of those theories seemed to be united in two aspects: “their intense career ambitions and their rejection of religion.”⁴ He wanted to fit in, to be taken seriously, and to maintain his personal independence, so he adopted a superficial atheism to do so. Yet he slowly discovered that the “wish-fulfillment” and “projection theory” and related ideas can be turned on their heads and used well to explain the *choice to disbelieve* in God. He finally came to examine history and the claims of Jesus Christ more fully—and found the Christian story convincing. He abandoned both superficial atheism and nominal Christianity for a genuine commitment of faith—with all its practical inconveniences like churchgoing, Bible reading, prayer, and helping others in Jesus’ name.

Take it home (applications).

I. GOD SEES INTO OUR HEARTS TODAY. It is not mere respectability or church-going that matters. This alone will not save us. We need Christ. God loves us too much to be distracted by the outward things of our lives. He wants our hearts.

II. IS GOD CALLING US TO HIMSELF?

1. We must repent of spiritual pride, of hypocrisy, of stubbornness.
2. We must trust in Jesus’ death and resurrection.
3. We must confess our faith in Him.

³ Dr. Paul C. Vitz, *Faith of the Fatherless: The Psychology of Atheism, Second Edition* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press), 2013. See especially the chapter entitled, “Superficial Atheism: A Personal Account,” pp. 165-175.

⁴ Vitz, p. 171.