

The Kindness of God

[Romans 2:1-4](#)



We are looking at the second section of Romans, which runs from [1:18-3:20](#). In this section we see that God is the righteous Judge whose wrath is extended toward the covenant breakers.

Let me remind you of a few things we have already seen in our studies. Paul is writing to the Romans because he wants to use Rome as a base of operations to reach the western Mediterranean. Paul wanted to unify the church in Rome through doctrine so that the church would be a strong base for world evangelism.

Paul begins by introducing the gospel. What did it mean to Paul's Roman audience? The Gospel, for Paul, is "Jesus Christ is Lord". It is a royal summons to obedience, and the form that this obedience takes is faith.

So, Paul discusses his message, he discusses himself as the messenger, and then he crystallizes the thesis of the Epistle, which will unfold in the remaining chapters in:

Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?

Romans 2:4 NASB

Do you underestimate the true value of God's kindness?

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH." Romans 1:16-17 NASB

I believe that these two verses form the theme and the thesis for the Epistle to the Romans. The whole Epistle is really an expansion of what we see in verses 16 and 17.

Paul was not disappointed in the Good News, because it is the power of God bringing salvation to all who believe, [both Jews and Greeks](#). In the Good News the righteousness of God is being revealed. We interpreted this to mean God's covenant faithfulness.

The second section runs from [1:18-3:20](#) and is all about God's righteousness. Paul using a quote from Habakkuk in Romans 1, is saying God will be faithful to His covenant, which involves judgment of the covenant breakers—those who reject the Gospel of Jesus Christ. God is faithful to the covenant and part of that involves wrath against the covenant breakers. So from the quote in Habakkuk, Paul launches right into the wrath of God.

I said that Romans chapter 1, verse 19 through verse 32 is not talking about all of us having **general revelation**. Instead, I believe it's talking about Israel, who alone had special revelation, but turned away from the truth they knew. And because they turned from God, His wrath was about to be poured out upon them. Chapter one ends with the following verse:

and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them. Romans 1:32 NASB

Israel "**knew**" the ordinance of God, they knew that their actions were worthy of death, and they not only did them anyway, but they approved of others who practiced them.

For our study this morning we begin chapter 2, and today we'll look at the first four verses:

Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? Romans 2:1-4 NASB

Notice that Paul changes here from *“they”* to *“you”*. In the first 15 verses he uses *“you”* speaking of the Roman Christians and then shifts to *“them”* and *“they”* in verses 19 thru 32:

because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. Romans 1:19-20 NASB

Paul uses “they and them” referring to Israel for the rest of the chapter and then he switches to “you” in chapter 2. So who is the *“you”*? Paul switches to the second person singular, *“you.”* This does not mean that Paul is now accusing his readers, Roman Christians, of these things; if he were doing that he would be using the second person plural. Paul is here addressing contemporary Jews:

But if you bear the name "Jew" and rely upon the Law and boast in God, Romans 2:17 NASB

Scholars generally agree that Paul is using here, and sporadically throughout the letter, a literary style called diatribe. Diatribe style, which is demonstrated in several ancient authors as well as elsewhere in the New Testament, we see it used in James. Diatribe was a well-known way of teaching truth. In this style, the writer engages in debate with imaginary opponents, putting them on the spot, asking them rhetorical questions, answering their supposed objections. Paul creates a double audience: the real one (the Christians in Rome) and the hypothetical opponent.

N. T. Wright says, *“To understand this section of Romans, we must envisage Paul intending his Christian audience in Rome to listen in on a conversation between himself and imaginary Jewish interlocutors whom he is addressing.”*

[Romans 2:1-16](#) sets forth the principles of divine judgment. We will see in these verses that God judges according to truth or **reality** and he points this out in the first 4 verses. God judges according to **works** pointing that out in verse 5 through verse 11, to conclude the section by clearly stipulating that God judges **impartially**. So he judges according to reality. He judges according to works. He judges impartially.

The reality and the inescapability of the judgment of God are elementary truths of the Bible. Later in Romans Paul writes:

But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, "AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD." Romans 14:10-11 NASB

God’s judgment is certain to every human being. From His judgment there is no escape.

There are four possible escapes from human judgment. In the first place, it's possible that a man's offense might not become known. He may really be guilty of a crime, but if he alone knows about it, he is able to escape judgment. Then there's always a chance that the guilty person may escape the boundaries of the place in which his crime is guilty and, thus, escape human judgment. It's also possible that after apprehension by the authorities, he may somehow or another experience the results of a breakdown of human justice and, therefore, escape the ultimate judgment. And, finally, even after judgment has been pronounced and he's been committed to an institution, it is possible to escape from such a place of detention and live in a measure of freedom.

These four possible escapes from human judgment do not, however, apply with reference to divine judgment. There is no way to escape. For example, it is impossible that one's crime shall be unknown to God, for the Bible says concerning him,

O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You

understand my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, And are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Psalms 139:1-3 NASB

It's not possible to escape into a territory beyond his jurisdiction like a man who commits crime in America and escapes across the border to Mexico. Because that same Psalms says concerning our God,

Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. Psalms 139:7-8 NASB

We are hopelessly bound up within His own territory. It is also impossible for us to experience any break down in the legal processes because the Scripture says concerning Him:

"For I proclaim the name of the LORD; Ascribe greatness to our God! "The Rock! His work is perfect, For all His ways are just; A God of faithfulness and without injustice, Righteous and upright is He. Deuteronomy 32:3-4 NASB

And once we are under His judgment, once we are detained as guilty, it is impossible for us to escape Him because, as we saw in Psalm 139, He is *"intimately acquainted with all my ways"*. There is no escaping God's justice.

Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. Romans 2:1 NASB

"Therefore"—demands that we see the connection to what has gone before. I see this as referring to verses 19-32, the sins of Israel. Schreiner and many other commentators have trouble with the "therefore". Schreiner writes, "The precise connection between verse 1 and the preceding verses is somewhat puzzling since it is not immediately clear how 'therefore' relates to what has just been said." It would be troubling if you don't see the preceding verses as speaking of Israel. If they are talking about the Gentiles then the "therefore" is troubling.

"You have no excuse"—speaking to an imaginary Jewish interlocutor, who represents the Jews of Paul's day. **"Everyone of you who passes judgment"**—the Jews of Paul's day thought they were righteous and condemned the Gentiles for their sin. The Jew had gladly assumed seat of the judge. He pronounced the Gentiles guilty of God's eternal wrath. Paul says, **"For in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things"**—they were judging the Gentiles by the standards of the Law, thus condemning themselves because they did the same things as is evident from the previous verses.

We see this verse fleshed out in the story of David and Nathan. It takes place shortly after David had chosen to secretly commit adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, and had sent Uriah to his death. David had quickly married Bathsheba, who was pregnant, and assumed his sins would remain secret. But in 2 Samuel 12:1-6 we read:

Then the LORD sent Nathan to David. And he came to him and said, "There were two men in one city, the one rich and the other poor. "The rich man had a great many flocks and herds. "But the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb Which he bought and nourished; And it grew up together with him and his children. It would eat of his bread and drink of his cup and lie in his bosom, And was like a daughter to him. "Now a traveler came to the rich man, And he was unwilling to take from his own flock or his own herd, To prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him; Rather he took the poor man's ewe lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him." Then David's anger burned greatly against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, surely the man who has done this deserves to die. "He must make restitution for the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing and had no compassion." 2 Samuel 12:1-6 NASB

Nathan told the king about the cruelty of a rich man who slaughtered the beloved pet of his neighbor to feed his visitor. David is outraged at the terrible thing that has been done. As the king he announces a verdict. Then Nathan, the prophet of God, turns to him, points his finger at David, and says, "You are the man!" The revelation is striking—the judge who pronounces guilt is the guilty man. David finds that in judging another he condemned himself, because the judge was doing the same things.

Now, I want you to understand that it is not wrong to make a judgment. Although most of the world thinks it is. How many of you have said something like, "The Muslims don't know God" or "The Jews are apostates" or "Homosexuality is a sin", and

had someone respond:

"Do not judge so that you will not be judged. Matthew 7:1 NASB

This verse is probably quoted more by people who don't know Christ or the Bible than any other passage in all of Scripture. When Jesus says that we are not to judge, many people have interpreted that to mean that we are not to engage in any form of analysis or evaluation of others. In other words, this line of thinking says that we cannot conclude that a person's behavior or lifestyle is wrong, and that they are consequently wrong for engaging in it. Those who would like to justify all manner of evil use this verse to chasten anyone who would take a stand for righteousness.

When the Lord said, **"do not judge"** one of the things he had in mind was hypocritical judgment. This is evident from the verses which immediately follow. The one who is quick to detect the minor faults of others while blind to, or unconcerned about, his own serious sins is a hypocrite. Jesus is saying the same thing Paul says in our text in Romans 1.

"Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? 'You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. Matthew 7:4-5 NASB

To attempt to help him remove a **"speck"** in his eye, while you have a 2by4 in your eye, is downright hypocrisy. A **"hypocrite"** is the actor of a part, one pretending to be very zealous as to the requirements of holiness, while himself living in neglect and great sin.

God judges according to reality:

And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. Romans 2:2 NASB

I think it might be better to translate this verse, **"But we know that the judgment of God is according to reality or truth on such ones as those practicing these things."** The emphasis is that God's judgment is never a stab in the dark or capricious or unfair. He knows all the facts. He sees every act. He observes every attitude and thought. He recognizes the gravity in every word, deed, or thought. He notes the details of every violation of His holy Law.

We know that the judgment of God rightly falls [or, literally, "is according to truth"]. Truth here refers, not to the gospel, but to reality, to life as it actually is. God's judgment is according to truth, according to things as they really are.

God's judgment is according to reality. It's like an assayer of metal when someone brings him a bar of gold bullion, He doesn't look at it and say, "Now, before I assay this metal, I need to know where you got it. I need to know how old it is. I need to know what country it came from." No, his job is simply to look at the metal and tell you the exact percentage of gold that is found in it. That is his job. He seeks to judge according to reality.

It is God's nature to be true, to judge rightly:

For You have maintained my just cause; You have sat on the throne judging righteously. Psalms 9:4 NASB

Paul goes on to say:

But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? Romans 2:3 NASB

The Jews were wrong in presuming upon their unique status as a nation. **They thought that their privileged position exempted them from the judgment of God.** The Jew traditionally believed no Jew would ever experience that kind of condemnation with the pagans. They believed that because they were Jewish, born into the line of Abraham, because they were circumcised and because they kept the trappings of the Jewish religion, that they were exempt from any judgment.

For example, they had some interesting sayings. One of them was, **"God will judge the Gentiles with one measure and the Jews with another."** They said this, **"Abraham sits beside the gates of hell and does not permit any wicked Israelite to go through."**

When [Justyn Martyr](#) was arguing with the Jew in [the Dialogue of Trifo](#), the Jew said this, *"They who are the seed of Abraham according to the flesh shall in any case, even if they be sinners and unbelieving and disobedient toward God, still share in the eternal Kingdom."*

The Jews of Paul's day were deluded into thinking they would not be judged.

Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? Romans 2:4 NASB

What does this verse tell us about God? It tells us that **God is kind**. In chapter 1 we talked about how the wrath of God is displayed from heaven; He actively hands men over to judgment. And in this section dealing with the wrath of God we see God's kindness.

The word *"kindness"*, [chrestotes](#), means *good in the sense of being generous, good in the sense of merciful, good in the sense of kind*. And so kindness is an apt translation of this word. Its equivalent in the First Testament is the Hebrew word [chesed](#) which basically is translated loving kindness. This is an attribute of God. God is by nature kind, tender-hearted, compassionate.

The First Testament extols the kindness of God as a reason for worship. In fact, it is most often referred to in the Psalms which is the worship book of the First Testament.

Good and upright is the LORD; Therefore He instructs sinners in the way. Psalms 25:8 NASB

How great is Your goodness, Which You have stored up for those who fear You, Which You have wrought for those who take refuge in You, Before the sons of men! Psalms 31:19 NASB

He loves righteousness and justice; The earth is full of the lovingkindness of the LORD. Psalms 33:5 NASB

Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man? The lovingkindness of God endures all day long. Psalms 52:1 NASB

In Romans 2:4, the term *chrestotes* is used twice and in the NAS translated kindness both times. It's kindness as goodness expressed in being kind.

In talking to the Jewish interlocutor, Paul says, *"You've experienced the kindness of God"*. This is especially true in the case of Israel. They were given the Law of God. They knew the Law of God. Paul will express this later on in chapter 3, in chapter 9, and then again in chapter 10; that they (Israel) received the Law and the covenants and the promises and the Messiah.

If the rest of the world has experienced the goodness of God in common grace, Israel has received the greater goodness of God by being a covenant people.

Nehemiah chapter 8 tells about Israel finding and reading of the book of the Law. The people understood it as it was explained to them. They were heartbroken over the fact that they had ignored the Law of God, that they had rejected the Law of God, that they had disobeyed the Law of God. So in chapter 9 verse 1, *"They assembled with fasting and sack cloth and dirt on them."* That was a way to express humiliation.

Their worship is seen starting in verse 5. *"Arise, bless the Lord your God forever and ever. O may Your glorious name be blessed and exalted above all blessing and praise."*

They blessed the Lord. And what did they bless Him for? His amazing care of the nation, His goodness, His kindness and His mercy. And keep in mind, this was a recalcitrant, rebellious, impenitent, idolatrous nation of Israel. And yet He continued to be good to them.

"You alone are the LORD. You have made the heavens, the heaven of heavens with all their host, The earth and all that is on it, The seas and all that is in them. You give life to all of them and the heavenly host bows down before You. You are the LORD God, Who chose Abram And brought him out from Ur of the

Chaldees, And gave him the name Abraham. "You found his heart faithful before You, And made a covenant with him To give him the land of the Canaanite, Of the Hittite and the Amorite, Of the Perizzite, the Jebusite and the Girgashite-- To give it to his descendants. And You have fulfilled Your promise, For You are righteous. "You saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, And heard their cry by the Red Sea. "Then You performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh, Against all his servants and all the people of his land; For You knew that they acted arrogantly toward them, And made a name for Yourself as it is this day. "You divided the sea before them, So they passed through the midst of the sea on dry ground; And their pursuers You hurled into the depths, Like a stone into raging waters. "And with a pillar of cloud You led them by day, And with a pillar of fire by night To light for them the way In which they were to go. "Then You came down on Mount Sinai, And spoke with them from heaven; You gave them just ordinances and true laws, Good statutes and commandments. "So You made known to them Your holy sabbath, And laid down for them commandments, statutes and law, Through Your servant Moses. "You provided bread from heaven for them for their hunger, You brought forth water from a rock for them for their thirst, And You told them to enter in order to possess The land which You swore to give them. "But they, our fathers, acted arrogantly; They became stubborn and would not listen to Your commandments. "They refused to listen, And did not remember Your wondrous deeds which You had performed among them; So they became stubborn and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But You are a God of forgiveness, Gracious and compassionate, Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness; And You did not forsake them. **Nehemiah 9:6-17 NASB**

There's that word goodness, kindness. You have so much kindness, so much mercy, so generous in Your goodness and You did not forsake them, even when they made a molten calf, You were compassionate toward them:

"Even when they made for themselves A calf of molten metal And said, 'This is your God Who brought you up from Egypt,' And committed great blasphemies, You, in Your great compassion, Did not forsake them in the wilderness; The pillar of cloud did not leave them by day, To guide them on their way, Nor the pillar of fire by night, to light for them the way in which they were to go. "You gave Your good Spirit to instruct them, Your manna You did not withhold from their mouth, And You gave them water for their thirst. "Indeed, forty years You provided for them in the wilderness and they were not in want; Their clothes did not wear out, nor did their feet swell. "You also gave them kingdoms and peoples, And allotted them to them as a boundary.

They took possession of the land of Sihon the king of Heshbon And the land of Og the king of Bashan. "You made their sons numerous as the stars of heaven, And You brought them into the land Which You had told their fathers to enter and possess. "So their sons entered and possessed the land. And You subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, And You gave them into their hand, with their kings and the peoples of the land, To do with them as they desired. "They captured fortified cities and a fertile land. They took possession of houses full of every good thing, Hewn cisterns, vineyards, olive groves, Fruit trees in abundance. So they ate, were filled and grew fat, And reveled in Your great goodness. **Nehemiah 9:18-25 NASB**

God was good to Israel and look how they responded:

"But they became disobedient and rebelled against You, And cast Your law behind their backs And killed Your prophets who had admonished them So that they might return to You, And they committed great blasphemies. "Therefore You delivered them into the hand of their oppressors who oppressed them, But when they cried to You in the time of their distress, You heard from heaven, and according to Your great compassion You gave them deliverers who delivered them from the hand of their oppressors. "But as soon as they had rest, they did evil again before You; Therefore You abandoned them to the hand of their enemies, so that they ruled over them.

When they cried again to You, You heard from heaven, And many times You rescued them according to Your compassion, And admonished them in order to turn them back to Your law. Yet they acted arrogantly and did not listen to Your commandments but sinned against Your ordinances, By which if a man observes them he shall live. And they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck, and would not listen. "However, You bore with them for many years, And admonished them by Your Spirit through Your prophets, Yet they would not give ear. Therefore You gave them into the hand of the peoples of the

lands. Nehemiah 9:26-30 NASB

In their disobedience and rebellion He kept being good to them:

"Nevertheless, in Your great compassion You did not make an end of them or forsake them, For You are a gracious and compassionate God. "Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and lovingkindness, Do not let all the hardship seem insignificant before You, Which has come upon us, our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers and on all Your people, From the days of the kings of Assyria to this day. "However, You are just in all that has come upon us; For You have dealt faithfully, but we have acted wickedly. "For our kings, our leaders, our priests and our fathers have not kept Your law Or paid attention to Your commandments and Your admonitions with which You have admonished them. "But they, in their own kingdom, With Your great goodness which You gave them, With the broad and rich land which You set before them, Did not serve You or turn from their evil deeds. Nehemiah 9:31-35 NASB

This is the story of rebellious, sinful, impenitent, disobedient people in the face of constant goodness. It was 700 years of God's goodness to a rebellious idolatrous northern kingdom before God hauled them off in judgment. It was 800 years for the southern kingdom of Judah.

What caused the repentance at the great revival in Nehemiah 8 and 9? What caused it was a remembering of the goodness of the Lord, it led them to repentance.

Paul writes, **"Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness"**—the words **"think lightly"** are from the Greek word *kataphroneo*, which means: **"to think lightly, to despise"**. The verb means, **to treat with contempt, to belittle, to scorn, to mock, to repudiate**. Do you underestimate the true value of God's kindness?

The basic attitude of society today is that God is harsh. People look at Haiti, a quarter of a million people killed. People look at Pakistan, or some other place where monsoonal rains and floods obliterate hundreds and thousands of people. They look at Indonesia where another quarter of a million people died in the tsunami and they say, **"How can God allow this? What kind of God is God?"** They see the judgment of God from time to time, and they conclude that this must mean that God is harsh and without mercy and without kindness.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The truth is that all the sinners who perish in those disasters should have perished long before, right? The wages of sin is death. The fact that they lived to that event is an extension of mercy.

Here in this verse, we are reminded not to think lightly, not to despise, not to belittle the riches, the fullness, the richness of goodness, kindness, tolerance and patience. Kindness, chrestotes, the positive, divine generosity. Tolerance, *anochē*, is the word for **a truce**, which is the negative word for the absence of hostility. That's what it means. God holds back His anger and God grants blessing. And the third word is the word long-suffering, *makrothumia*, **patience with people**. He is benevolent for a long time. God's justice does not demand that he punish us for our sins immediately. But his kindness leads him to forbear and to be patient with us. He holds back His hostility for a long time.

God is by nature good, kind, giving benefits to sinners. This is called **common grace**, He makes the sun and the rain to fall on the just and the unjust. He has tolerance, which means He withholds the justice that sinners deserve and He does these both for a long period of time.

Sinners live and sinners prosper and sinners enjoy life and they are blessed in life with temporal blessings, earthly blessings, all the joys of life. God has every reason to wipe us out, every reason to wipe out the whole human race. But His goodness and His forbearance cause Him to bring positive blessings into the lives of sinners and to withhold judgment.

The Jews took God's goodness for granted. People take it for granted today. They take love and friendship and beauty and warmth and emotions and food and drink and clothing and nature and children and pleasure for granted. They live in mercy. They live in the kindness of God, blessing them and withholding judgment. They live there so long and so comfortably that they get used to grace and think they deserve it.

For people to say God is unjust because there was an earthquake, God is unjust because there was a tsunami, God is unjust because somebody got cancer, God is unjust because people die in terrorist acts is an incredible turn around from the truth that

God is so good and merciful that He withholds judgment, that He pours out mercy though it is undeserved.

William Gurnal wrote in 1660, *“When I consider how the goodness of God is abused by the greatest part of mankind, I cannot but be of His mind that said, The greatest miracle in the world is God’s patience and bounty to an ungrateful world.”*

Stop and think about the multiple ways that God has shown you kindness. What have you done with it? You’ve consumed His air and sunshine, and you’ve eaten His food and worn His clothes, and you’ve lived in His house and worked at His job or attended His school.

The earth is the LORD’S, and all it contains, The world, and those who dwell in it. Psalms 24:1 NASB

God is kind. This kindness should lead us to repentance!



This message was preached by [David B. Curtis](#) on January 16, 2011. Media #535.

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