

Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church
Paul's Letter to the Romans – Chapter 2, Verses 12-24
Notes from Tuesday August 10, 2010
Last Revised on August 13, 2010

Songs

Opening Prayer

Dear Lord

Thank you for this day and this evening that you have made.

Please watch over us and protect us from all evil.

Please guide our understanding of Paul's Letter to the Romans.

Especially the part we will study this evening.

Please help us to understand not only what Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome,

but also what your Spirit is speaking to our hearts today.

In Jesus Name we pray.

Amen

Introduction

In this class, for those of you who are new, we are studying the Letter of Paul to the Romans.

Notes for all previous classes have been posted on the class web site, for your review.

Last week our reading took us up to Verse 11 of Chapter 2.

Before we read on, I will review a bit.

Review

Please look with me at Chapter 1.

The first 15 1/2 verses are **introductory**, but they tell us some important things.

They tell us that we are reading a letter written by the Apostle Paul to **Christians**.

- This group included Jews and Gentiles, Greeks and barbarians, wise and foolish, and so on, but they were all believers in Christ, or at least this is what Paul apparently presumes (c.f. 1:7) and I think it is important to our understanding to bear this constantly in mind.
- What we are reading, then, is not an evangelistic message written to convert non-believers to faith in Christ, nor are these words spoken otherwise to people outside the church.
- It is, rather, an exercise in catechism, adult Christian education, doctrinal instruction.
- Paul is teaching brothers and sisters **in** Christ more about the gospel by which they are **already** being saved. (The same is true, come to think of it, for the Bible in general.)

We also learn from the introductory verses, that the diverse group of Christian believers to whom this letter was written originally, were located in a city which Paul had **never before visited**.

- That this city happened to be Rome, the center of the world at that time, may also be important for other reasons; but what I wish to emphasize this evening is simply that in writing to Rome, Paul is writing to people he didn't know in a place he had never been.
- This makes Romans different in some ways from Paul's other letters and different in some ways from his teaching record in the Acts of the Apostles.
- In Acts we read Luke's summary of how Paul traveled around teaching, face to face and in person in the various cities he visited. We notice how Paul tailored his message to suit the capacity and background and needs and problems of particular groups of people.
- And ordinarily when Paul wrote letters (at least judging from the ones we have) he reinforced what he had taught previously in person, and he addressed particular problems and issues of which he had become aware during his prior visits.
- But here in Romans, we have Paul addressing a diverse group of Christians all at once and in writing, and these are people whom he has never taught in person and does not know well.
- This document, then, needs to stand on its own, without the benefit of Paul's face-to-face teaching or his personal relationships or the benefit of particular local illustrations, and it needs to apply to the problems and issues of a variety of readers.
- It is no wonder, then, that this letter is longer, more structured, and in some ways

more difficult and theologically dense than Paul's other writings and teachings.

- The letter has been described as “tractate” ---- a letter which reads sort of like a tract --- but it is not, as we have already observed, a tract written for non-believers. It is intended for distribution to all kinds of believers in all kinds of circumstances.

These are the points I wanted to draw out and emphasize for this evening, particularly in view of some of the email I have received since last week. When reading Romans, I think it will often help us to remember two things: (1) it is speaking to Christians, and can really only be understood by Christians and in light of our Christian experience; and (2) it is speaking to all Christians in all circumstances, which means that it may not at every point be speaking to you with equal force, depending on who and where you are now, in your Christian walk.

OK now please look with me once again, as we review the first 5 verses of Chapter 1.

- Paul reminds us that the gospel he proclaims, is the gospel “**of God**”
- which grammatically could mean the gospel “**about**” God or the gospel “**from**” God.
- The word translated “**gospel**” has the meaning “**message of good news.**”
- So the “gospel of God” (verse 1) is “**God’s message of good news,**” which could mean either the message of good news comes **from** God or the message of good news which is **about** God or (as I think) it could mean both of these things. (white board)
- In verse 2 Paul sheds some light on this by saying that this message of good news is about something promised beforehand, by the prophets, as read in the holy scriptures.
- So this message of good news involves certain divine promises which have been kept and certain prophecies which have been fulfilled.
- In verse 3 Paul helps us out some more, by saying that this thing that was foreseen and promised, which has happened more recently, and is a message of good news, is “concerning God’s son.”
- more specifically, the One who is a man descended from King David, according to the flesh.
- This man, we are told in verse 4, was declared to be the Son-of-God-in-power by his resurrection from the dead.
- Now Paul clearly speaks of the man Jesus, of Nazareth, whom he calls “Christ” and “Our Lord.”
- And then he goes on in verse 5 to make it plain that this son of David has been and is proclaimed Lord, not just of Israel, but of all the nations.

- This means that the eternal kingdom which God promised to David and his descendants, has been inherited and fulfilled by Jesus of Nazareth, who shall himself reign forevermore, and who has now thrown open the doors of his eternal kingdom to all the nations, to all who believe.
- In this we find the fulfillment of much that is written in the holy Scriptures, and this is so important for our understanding of the Gospel and of Romans.
- **Everything** has **always** been about the coming of this eternal kingdom!

Let's now drop down to the latter part of Verse 16, after the first comma, and examine that in conjunction with the following Verse 17.

- Here Paul says that the gospel he proclaims is “**the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes,**” to the Jew first and also to the Greek
- Just **hearing** about Jesus....the proclamation itself.... somehow saves us, we in whom such hearing produces the right kind of faith,
- faith that sees in Jesus the revelation of the righteousness of God (verse 17).
- Again righteousness **of** God grammatically could mean the righteousness which **belongs** to God, or the righteousness which **comes** from God, or (as I think) both.
- Only God **is** righteous, which is something we see ultimately revealed in Christ.
- Therefore any righteousness we have is received **from** God as a free gift or, as we say, by grace.
- The only way to receive such a gift from God is through faith.
- That is we must believe the gospel, God's message of good news concerning his son, that our sins have been forgiven because of what Jesus accomplished on the cross, and that his righteousness has been imputed to us, and that God himself, the Holy Spirit, has already come to live in us forever.
- The very last part of verse 17, quoting the prophet Habakkuk says “the righteous shall live by faith” or as translated in the ESV margin, the righteous by faith shall live.
- And we understand that this is the **only** way to eternal life, Because apart from Christ, all humanity, every single one of us, without exception, deserve only death, because of our manifest godlessness and unrighteousness.

That is the gist of verses 18 - 32 (i.e. the remainder) of Chapter 1, which we have already

discussed and shall not review in detail this evening.

Suffice it to say that, apart from Christ, none of us can escape God's wrath and save ourselves.

We are all without excuse, and there are no exceptions, and God shows no partiality, which is gist of the first 11 verses of Chapter 2. Please look with me there.

- In view of the total depravity of man, because we are all without excuse, we should all keep our mouths shut (!) and flee to the foot of the cross for the salvation only Christ can give. And we should never think that we have any goodness of our own at all.
- But instead what we nearly all do, is to excuse and justify and even glorify ourselves by contemplating the shortcomings of others, in the church and in the world.
- "Surely," we often say, and more often think, and still more often feel, "we are good people, better than many within the church and better than most within the world."
- We are especially prone to think this way if we are civilized, cultured, and well educated people, especially if we are also religious people, and most especially if we are especially religious: pastors, teachers, counselors, and the like.
- But when we judge others in this way, this has the opposite effect of what we imagine.
- Rather than justifying ourselves, we actually condemn ourselves, Paul says.
- We prove when we judge that we know what sin is, but since we do the same things as those whom we judge, we merely judge ourselves of those same sins and add to them the charge of hypocrisy.
- What is worse, by seeking to justify ourselves in this way, we fail to justify ourselves in the only way that works: namely by repenting of our own sins and turning to Christ for forgiveness.
- It is by repenting of our own sins and turning to Christ for forgiveness and, then, being led by the Spirit to perform works pleasing to God, that we store up for ourselves the rewards that will be revealed on the day of judgment.
- But to continue sinning, by judging others, is to store up wrath for ourselves on the day of judgment.

Hopefully these remarks help us to understand the argument that Paul is developing in Verses 1-11 of Chapter 2.

Before we move on, let me say just a few words regarding "works righteousness"

- Paul never teaches, here or elsewhere, that we are saved **by** our good works. He teaches, instead, always and everywhere, that we are saved **for** good works.
- This thought is encapsulated in Ephesians, Chapter 2, Verses 8-10.
- Please turn there. Would somebody please read that in Japanese.
- Thanks. Now would somebody please read that in English:

(Ephesians 2:8-10)

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

- As we continue reading in Romans, I think we shall see that Paul's teaching is fully consistent with what he has expressed in Ephesians 2:8-10.
- And we will find this to be consistent with the teaching of the whole Bible....
-namely that our faith in God, itself, and such works as are expressions of our faith, are all **God's** workmanship and therefore pleasing to him.
- Certainly such works contain nothing in which we have any right to boast.
- Conversely whatever we suppose that we have accomplished, or have to boast about, can never please God.
- These principles apply equally to all men, and especially to religious men, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. God shows no partiality, as Paul says in verse 11 of Chapter 2.
- Here I am reminded of Paul's Letter to the Galatians, Chapter 5, Verse 6.
- Please turn there. Will somebody please read that in Japanese.
- Thank you. Now in English:

(Galatians 5:6)

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

- “....only **faith****working**....through **love**.....counts for anything...”

- Paul says “**in Christ Jesus**” ... what matters is “faith working through love.”
- and such faith has **Christ** as its object.
- The statement has no meaning, so far as I can see, among non-believers.
- Likewise in what we are about to read next in Romans, it may be best to remind ourselves, yet again, that Paul is here writing only to Christians.

The Letter of Paul to the Romans, Chapter 2, Verse 12-16

Will somebody please read Romans, Chapter 2, Verses 12-16 in Japanese.

Thank you. Now will someone please read those same verses in English.

12 For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.

13 For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.

14 For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law.

15 They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them

16 on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

Thank you.

Clearly as we said before, and as we shall see, Paul is developing and shaping an argument that he will soon (starting in verse 17) apply specifically to those among the Christians in Rome who are Jews.

And he probably does have Jewish Christians increasingly in mind as he moves along,

but even in what we have just read, I think Paul may not be completely focused on them,

because Jewish scripture is Christian scripture too, even now

and in Paul's day Jewish scripture was the only Christian scripture.

 And we know that Paul and other Apostles and Christian leaders spent long months and years in Antioch, and Ephesus, and Corinth, and elsewhere teaching Christians from these scriptures.

 And we know that the study of scriptures can and does have a beneficial effect on human thought and behavior. (Otherwise what are we all doing here!?)

 Paul himself said in 2 Timothy, 3:16 that “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” Here Paul could only have been referring to the Old Testament.

 And so among the Christians in Rome, those who were biblically literate (be they Jew or Gentile) may have been outstanding in many ways: seen to possess knowledge, and wisdom, and piety beyond the measure of other people.

 But even so, Paul wants to say, this does not mean that there are two classes of Christians, certainly not in the sense of moral superiority!

 In verses 1-11 of Paul has said, in effect, “it doesn’t matter who you are but what you do.”

 Now in verses 12-16 Paul is saying, in effect, “it doesn't matter what you know but what you do,

 and not merely what you do externally, but what you do for the love of Christ, as an outward expression of a changed heart.

 It is possible, in other words, insofar as men can see, to know scripture almost perfectly and even to keep it almost perfectly, but still to miss the point which, I dare say, is finally love of God and love of man, or to use the words of Paul in Galatians 5:6 “...faith working through love.”

 This is a lesson taught frequently by Christ himself as recounted in the gospels.

 Let’s look at the detail...verse 12 reads

(Verse 12)

For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.

 The immediately preceding point, remember, is that “God shows no partiality.”

 Even those who know the scripture well do not get a special moral status before God

 Satan himself probably knows scripture very well, and this does not save him.

 On the other hand, since all men are deeply and utterly depraved, as discussed in Chapter 1, we cannot suppose that ignorance of the law, even real ignorance, would ever be sufficient to save any man from destruction.

 It is our relationship with Christ that saves us from destruction, apart from our knowledge of scripture, or lack thereof!

(Verse 13)

For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.

This repeats much of what has gone before in a pithy and memorable way.

 Just hearing the law, but not understanding it, of course, changes nothing for the better.

 Hearing and understanding the law, may help a lot, but not if you don't obey what you understand.

 What finally matters is what we **do** and not simply what we understand or merely hear.

 As we have discussed it is impossible to "do" the law apart from a real, inward faith in Christ.

 The proof of all of this is found most clearly among the Gentiles,

 and I believe that Paul has Gentile **Christians** in mind here, since he is writing this letter to Christians, many of whom, but not all of whom, were gentiles.

(Verse 14)

For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law.

It will no doubt have been noticed by Christians in Rome, that the best Christians were not always the best Bible scholars and, often even, were gentile Christians who grew up in a purely pagan environment.

 This should not be surprising, because the same has always been true in the Church and is true in our church now.

 Some of the best Christians I know grew up Islamic or Buddhist or atheistic and many of them still don't know their Bible very well, yet they are much better Christians than I. I have no doubt. This is what Paul is saying.

These people know what is right and they do it, because belonging to Jesus, as they do, they are led by the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit, by the way, who inspired the holy Scriptures and raised Jesus from the dead.

The Author of the Law and the power of His resurrection are in inside them!

(Verse 15)

They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them

We know that they understand the law in the way that really matters to God because they put it into practice

And not only that, there are internal emotional and intellectual processes going on, whereby they struggle to understand and to do what is right, even without the benefit of the letter of the law,

and I would add (by the way, although Paul does not say it here) such people are often the most eager Bible students, because they truly desire to understand God's will, which truly is revealed in the Bible.

But it will be not their understanding which is tested in the end, but their deeds, and not just how these deeds conform with the letter of the law, but how their hearts were yielded to the Spirit of Christ, living in them.

(Verse 16)

on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

Probably this refers to judgment day, but it is also possible to read this as the day of our salvation, the day when we first heard and believed the gospel, which is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believe.

In either case, this will not be a judgment based on knowledge of the law, in which Bible scholars have some sort of eternal advantage.

In the end there are no special categories, except two: those who say "Jesus Christ our Lord" and those who remain under the wrath of God.

I have read the preceding verses, with Augustine, Barth, Cranfield, and others as applying to Gentile and Jews who happen all to be Christians, as indeed were those to whom Paul wrote.

That reading is unconfused and, so far as I can see, uncontroversial.

 Q. But are the only Gentiles who behave well, those who happen to be Christian?

Q. But what about Ghandi, and all the others we can think of, many of them Japanese, who behave better than most of the Christians we know?

A. We can only say the same for them as we say for we Christians --- i.e. that nobody except Christ has ever been without sin and worthy of eternal life, on his own account.

A. We can only hope that the gospel of Christ gets through to these good people, and to all people, somehow, and do whatever we can to proclaim the gospel to them.

A. The rest is a mystery hidden in God, and bound up in Christ, as Paul as much as says in Verse 16.

It is Christ Himself who judges all of us in the end, he whose death alone atones for sin, and he will be the one to judge the secrets of men's hearts. Who knows what the Lord Jesus will do on that day?!

 But let us cling to him as soon and as quickly and as firmly as we possibly can. Amen.

Questions?

OK Let's read on.

The Letter of Paul to the Romans, Chapter 2, Verses 17-24

Will someone please read Romans, Chapter 2, Verses 17-24, in Japanese

Thank you. Now will someone please read those same verses in English.

17 But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God

18 and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law;

19 and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,

20 an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth---

21 you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal?

**22 You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery?
You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?**

23 You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law.

**24 For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles
because of you."**

OK. Now finally Paul is openly addressing those among the Christians in Rome who happen to be Jewish.

He is back to using the second person singular "you" as he did in the first paragraph of Chapter 2 where he was arguing, in a sort of diatribe, with those who suppose they have a right to judge other Christians.

Perhaps those who think that way (which is all of us most of the time) deserve to be spoken to in that sort of a diatribe!

Here he is arguing aggressively with Christians who proudly call themselves Jews, which is just the same as calling others "gentiles" in a way that amounts to the sort of judgement condemned in Verses 1-11.

Verse 17 reads:

(Verse 17)

But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God

Please remember, Paul is addressing Christians.

Q. So why would some of them call themselves Jews?

A. Because that was, in fact, their cultural and religious heritage. (No problem here.)

A. Because they regard Christianity as something that does not contain the whole value of Judaism!

In other words, they regard being a Jewish Christian as something better than being a Christian.

Or what amounts to the same thing: they regard Jewish Christians as better than Gentile Christians.

Now there is a problem! Because it suggests that there is something higher and better than Christ contained within Judaism.

 Q. How do those notions (i.e. of Jewish superiority within the church) manifest themselves?

A. Here (2:17) Paul has in mind a Christian who calls himself a Jew and who “relies on the law” and “boasts in God”

Q. Is that bad? (i.e. to rely on the law and boast in God)

A. Not necessarily. Here “law” includes all of “holy scripture” and boasting in God is often a very good thing. There are many evangelical Christians today who would not object to being described in this way, and I think Paul did not imagine that his imaginary adversary in this discussion would blush about being described in this way either.

It is here in verse 17 that most readers begin to sense a bit of irony seeping in to Paul’s diatribe.

It is as if he is saying, “So, you think of yourself as someone who really bases his life on the Bible and boasts in God alone, and you think that the best way to crown yourself that way is to lay hold of your status as a Jew?” (insert Catholic, Protestant, Baptist, etc.)

And as one of these Jewish (...) super-Christians you think that you ...

(Verse 18)

[and] know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law;

which is to say, “ you think your Bible knowledge gives you superior insight into God’s will and a better moral sense than other Christians have?

He continues in Verses 19 and 20

(Verses 19-20)

and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth---

Here Paul describes the man who has grabbed up his Bible and set himself up literally or figuratively as (at least in his own mind) a teacher of children, and instructor of the foolish, one who can bring the light to those who are blind or in darkness.

If this is what we think we are doing when we grab up the Bible and teach (as I am doing), or when we preach, or when we counsel other Christians, then Paul is speaking to us also, I think.

And I think he may be speaking also, even, to husbands and wives and parent and children who would dare to grab up the Bible and instruct one another from it...

But here of course primarily Paul is speaking to those who would have been the most Biblical people in the church at Rome (at least in their own minds) and that is the Christians who were Jews.

To them primarily but, also to those of us who hear these words spoken to us, Paul says:

(Verse 21)

you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal?

Brothers and sisters, I am afraid that we all steal a great deal, whether by taking that which does not belong to us, or refusing to give that which we own to another.

And that is just the stealing we do from one another in the world.

That by itself is almost limitless.

But then there is the stealing that we do from God: whenever we steal his glory for ourselves, whenever we withhold our obedience from him, whenever we refuse to give all we have to the poor.

It scares me to think how we use the Bible, the gospel, our spiritual gifts, to lift ourselves up, and put ourselves forward, and to judge and to put other people beneath us. Such stealing from God....is frightful.

And we all do it! Or at least I certainly do!!

Paul continues in Verse 22

(Verse 22)

You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?

Remember Paul is addressing Christians, Jewish Christians, who are using their Bible knowledge to put themselves up and other people down.

These people have grown up in a culture that was radically opposed to both adultery and idolatry, and they will have no trouble pointing to the scriptures that forbid such things, and demand that both things be punished by death, and neither will they have as much trouble as the gentiles do, in obeying these commandments, because of differing cultural taboos.

 Yet even so, there are plenty of religious leaders, in all times and places, who preach against adultery while committing adultery or, what is even worse in my view, molesting children and the like.

 It happens all the time. We read about it in our newspapers today. We read about it in the lives of the Patriarchs and even in the life of King David! And his Son Solomon. Surely it happened in Paul's day, even among the oh so proud and oh so Biblical Jewish Christians in Rome.

 Furthermore the word adultery has a pretty broad range of meaning in the Bible, and often is understood to include apostasy and disloyalty and the like.

 And of course Jesus famously extended the commandment against adultery to include even lusts of the mind, which makes virtually all men and women repeatedly and almost constantly guilty of adultery. Doesn't it?!

 So how dare we grab up our Bibles and elevate ourselves above others by teaching them to avoid the very same sins that we ourselves practice. There can simply be no Biblically moral upper class, since we all commit all of these sins in our secret heart which God can see.

 I am not sure precisely what point Paul is making about robbing temples, but proving that we are all guilty of blasphemy and idolatry is the easiest thing in the world. We are guilty of idolatry every single time that we let anything other than God assume ultimate importance, including our church, our ministry, and our Bible! And we do that hundreds of times a day.

(Verse 23)

You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law.

Paul is certainly not accusing the Jewish Christians of being more sinful than Gentile Christians, which they almost certainly were not, if such a comparison even has any meaning, which it probably does not, in view of Paul's overall teaching here --- that all are utterly corrupt and without excuse.

 What Paul is saying is that, because they are sinners, just like everyone else, those who make claims of being specially religious, specially familiar with and specially obedient to the law, are the very ones who dishonor God the most.

 Surely this is the case!

 There is nothing worse than a person who sets himself up as a Bible teacher and then commits the very sins that the Bible teaches against.

 And that is what I am.

So how dare I let myself be proud?!

But I do!

And how dare the Jewish Christians in Rome do that either?!

We are all without excuse! Let us all be very careful about claiming special status of any kind for ourselves.

(Verse 24)

For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

This is apparently a paraphrase of Ezekiel 36:20 although the ESV points to Isaiah 52:5; in either case I think we can clearly catch the point Paul means to illustrate with this citation.

Let's remind ourselves again that Paul is addressing Christians and, in particular, those who use their Jewishness to claim a special position within the church.

If they, then, break the law which they teach, they may draw Gentile Christians into similarly bad behavior; or they may cause great disillusionment and disappointment among those whom they teach within the church.

Or they may bring dishonor upon the Christian church in the eyes of both Jewish and Gentile non-believers in Rome and in the world.

In every way the damage done by their disobedience is magnified by their claims to be specially knowledgeable regarding and obedient to the law.

Nothing damages the progress of the gospel more than the bad behavior of Christians and, especially, the bad behavior of "exemplary" Christians and Church leaders.

Closing Prayer