

## Romans Chapter 2 - John Karmelich

Title "Three fingers pointing back at you!"

There's a famous expression, "When you point your finger at someone else, you got three other fingers pointing back at you!" In effect, that's what Chapter 2 of Romans is all about. (Yes, I know no chapter breaks exist in the original text!) The main purpose of the book of Romans is Paul wanted to explain to people he's never met, who is justified ("just as if one's never sinned") in God's eyes. Before Paul starts on the benefits of being a Christian or just who IS justified, he decides to go negative first, to explain a bit about who isn't saved. He wanted to do that so people can't think they'll be saved just for acting the way they do! So, Chapter 1 focuses on eternal punishment for nonbelievers. Chapter 2 then says, don't think being religious will help! To quote Jesus, "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, but then I will say depart from me I never knew you!" (Mathew 7:11-12 paraphrased a little!)

I can just hear many of you thinking, "But John, I go to church almost every Sunday, I read by bible on a daily basis, and I do this or that service at my church!" I'm not knocking any of those things. All that I'm saying (and Paul is saying) is our behavior as believers matters! Of course, we are saved by FAITH ALONE! I put that in bold as I get that clearly! In the Book of James, he makes a point of saying if we are saved by faith in effect, "What are we doing about it?" (Based on James 2:18.) Paul is simply trying to teach us in these chapters that having faith in God is "Step one". What we do with that faith will not only affect our witness for Jesus here on earth, but also affect our eternal destiny as well! I know that I am speaking to believers and Paul was as well! OK then, let me continue:

Paul opens the chapter (remember he's writing this letter to people who claim they're Christians (living in Rome) by saying you (again people who claim they're Christians) condemning those who don't go to church and saying in effect, "who do you think you are condemning, non-believers?" First, let's make it crystal clear that we're saved by faith alone, but then God judges all people based on works. He's going to judge non-believers based on what they knew (or could have known about God), then, what they did with that knowledge! As far as us believers, rewards exist in heaven! We'll be rewarded based on work we did as believers that God calls us to do. What about, say, children who die young? I'm trusting in a fair God to work that out! Again, there's no condemnation for believers, but I'm positive some of us are rewarded more than others. The New Testament is clear on that! God wants us to be aware that all He has called us to do has benefits over and above this lifetime! OK, back to the text:

Meanwhile Paul is still saying, "You think you're a better person because you're religious?" What he is effectively asking is, "Are we condemning people for sins that we're guilty of?" I know we're forgiven of all sins, past present and future, but that doesn't give us a "free license to sin"! Are we being a good witness for God if we do the same thing non-believers do? The issue's being a witness for God, not our salvation! To put this another way, we can believe with all our heart Jesus is God and Jesus was raised from the dead and is fully human and fully God. Paul is raising the question, "What are we doing about those facts"? If we're acting no better than non-believers, we'll still be saved but so what? No one will care if we are saved and why should God reward someone who doesn't act like a believer? Why should a non-believer be treated like a saved one in heaven? Does that mean we have to be perfect? Of course not! The evidence needs to show we're saved as our purpose on earth is to be a witness for God!

Paul goes on to state it doesn't matter if one is Jewish or non-Jewish. Paul assumed the church in Rome had a mixture of both. The Gospel was given to the Jewish people first. It is a chronological issue that

the Jewish people were told before those who were not Jewish! God does not show favoritism in terms of salvation based on one's religious background or national background (or sex for that matter)!

What about one's knowledge of the bible? I learned many years ago, the good news of bible knowledge is it draws us closer to God, because we have a better understand of what He demands of us. The bible states that those who don't know "it" will be judged based on what we perceive naturally! For example, murder or stealing is wrong, is natural knowledge! So, is it better to be bible naïve or knowledgeable? I would argue it's knowledgeable! There's a price that comes with that, as we are accountable for what it says. I also would apply that to people who could have bible knowledge. For example, there are lots of free bible apps one can download! In our modern world, excuses to not know God are rare!

Which leads us back to God's judgment. He judges us based on what we know or could have known. I am positive non-believers will be judged that way as well as believers (the former for sake of salvation, latter for rewards in heaven)!

From here Paul goes on an anti-Jewish "rant". Remember Paul is Jewish. His point is he knows lots of Jewish people and their "putting their money where their mouth is" in terms of obeying those laws isn't good on either a historical or current basis. Over 2,500 years ago, God used the Babylonians to take the Israelites from the land of Israel for disobedience! The Gospels imply they were kicked out of the land for their rejection of Jesus! (Paul wrote Romans about 15 years before that occurred.) Paul had history of proof when he condemned his fellow Jewish people for not obeying the law. They had a bad history of doing stuff that did displease God, while still doing required rituals in the Old Testament law!

Before you say, "too bad for them", remember why this chapter is REALLY here! It's the point those 3 fingers back at us religious types and ask are we any better than those we condemn for ignoring God? I have always been fascinated by the fact Jesus worse condemnations have been for the religious Jewish people he encountered and those less concerned about law obedience Jesus worked to draw them to the reason God called Jewish people into obedience in the first place! It's as if Jesus is saying, "All of you religious types are beyond help, I'm going to reach out to others who are hurting, and need God in their lives!" Don't get me wrong. The book of Acts mentions there were Pharisees (devoutly religious Jews) who became Christians after Jesus did rise from the dead! The underlying point is people who claim to be devoutly religious must "check themselves at the door" as the saved are ONLY saved by His grace!

Jesus does expect good works out of gratitude for what He did, not to earn our way into heaven. That is a good way to separate the key issue. The other is about a willingness to confess the issues we struggle with and say in effect, "God I can't win over this issue based on willpower! I give You that issue that I am struggling with so You can deal with it on your timetable and make me a better witness for You!" It is never about being perfect. It's about trusting God to guide our lives despite our faults and sins! If we are willing to admit we struggle with sin, it just means we're human and we're trusting God to guide for our salvation, and we desire to do His will!

The really good news (besides the fact we're eternally saved) is that if we turn every aspect of our lives to Him, He will guide our lives for His glory. One of the key purposes of the three chapter "Sermon on the Mount" (Matthew, Chapters 5-7) is to ask, "Do I trust God with this aspect of my life? What about that one?" It continues for three chapters! Ther other good news is we're almost done with the negative aspects of Romans. I realize Chapters 1 and 2 are tough sledding, but it's necessary to have these issues out in the open to consider before we can discuss the positive aspects of what justification means! Paul wants us to understand what it means to be a Christian, and in effect the first few chapters explain what a Chrisitan "is not" so bear with this!

With that said, hope you like this study. I wrote a more detailed one some years back. If you want to read that, click on one of the links below. It is still a joy to study this stuff and again I'm grateful for you reading this. If you're new here, you're always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks again for reading!

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That's it. Hope you enjoy it. Don't forget to fire up a prayer prior to your reading.