

## WITHOUT EXCUSE AND WITHOUT ESCAPE ROMANS 2:1-3

### INTRODUCTION

We are **all painfully aware** of humanity's **failures and shortcomings in upholding justice** within society.

**No matter which country you live in**, it seems that those who break the law are often able to **find ways to escape justice**.

In fact, there are **several ways** that lawbreakers escape human justice.

**First**, it's possible that the **person's offence will not become known**.

Many people get away **without any consequences** for their wrong because they manage to **keep it a secret**.

As long as those who are supposed to enforce justice never find out, the lawbreaker is able to get away with doing wrong.

**Second**, there is always the chance that the guilty person may be able to escape justice by **fleeing beyond the legal jurisdiction** under which the crime was committed.

Those who break the law in one country **simply cross the border** into another country where the police and the courts of the first country have **no authority to pursue them**.

**Third**, there are times when there is a **breakdown in the legal processes**.

Even in the most advanced justice systems, there are many examples of those who manage to **cheat the system or exploit a loophole** to escape justice.

Then there are others who **get away scot-free** because those who are responsible for enforcing the law are **themselves corrupt lawbreakers**.

**Fourth** and finally, sometimes criminals are **able to escape from prison** and **evade being caught again** so that they can live in a measure of freedom.<sup>1</sup>

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However, there are **no such possibilities with God**.

Throughout Scripture we are taught that the **justice and judgment of God** are **both real and inescapable**.

As we read in **Psalm 7:11-12**—

**11 God is a righteous judge, And a God who has indignation every day.**

**12 If a man does not repent, He will sharpen His sword; He has bent His bow and prepared it.**

Similarly, God declares in **Deuteronomy 32:41**—

**If I sharpen My flashing sword, and My hand takes hold on judgment, I will render vengeance on My adversaries, and I will repay those who hate Me.**

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. S. Lewis Johnson Jr., *Discovering Romans: Spiritual Revival for the Soul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 39.

Therefore, David asks of the wicked in **Psalm 56:7**—  
**For their crime will they escape? In wrath cast down the peoples, O God!**

We are assured of the judgement of God in **Proverbs 11:21**  
**Assuredly, the evil man will not go unpunished...**

Again in **Proverbs 16:5** we read—  
**Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to Yahweh; assuredly, he will not be unpunished.**

So we can say with certainty that the **justice and judgment of God** are **both real and inescapable**.

**Scripture teaches us** that the reason why God's judgement is certain is **because of His just and righteous character**.

Because “*God always acts in perfect conformity and harmony with His own character,*” **His justice and righteousness** mean that His judgement of sin is **both real and inescapable**.<sup>2</sup>

After noting that the Bible uses the terms *righteousness* and *justice* **interchangeably**, **Wayne Grudem** states that—  
“*God’s righteousness means that God always acts in accordance with what is right and is Himself the final standard of what is right.*”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Sam Storms, *Attributes of God* (Oklahoma City, OK: Sam Storms, 2006), “Justice.”

<sup>3</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 243.

That is what we learn from **Deuteronomy 32:4** as Moses declares in his song of praise—

**The Rock! His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He.**

While there are **many aspects to the justice of God**, including the rewards that He bestows on those who are faithful to Him, what Paul is focussing on in the text before us today is what we call God's **"retributive justice."**

That is the aspect of God's justice by which He **gives to each of us that which is our due.**

To put it simply, **God gives us what we deserve.**

For those who sinfully rebel against God, God's retributive justice is **synonymous with His judgement** or punishment of sin.

**Because God is just, sin must be punished.**

Therefore, God judges people **according to their deeds**—  
He punishes everyone according to the **evil they have done.**

In **Job 34:11**, we learn that God, **"pays a man according to his work..."**

In **Jeremiah 32:19**, the prophet says that God's **"eyes are open to all the ways of the sons of men, giving to everyone according to his ways and according to the fruit of his deeds."**

The same principle is affirmed in the New Testament, as we see in **Matthew 16:27** when Jesus speaks of **His coming judgement**—

**For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay each one according to his deeds.**

It's **the justice of God** that makes **the judgment of God** according to our deeds **certain**.

**Because God is just, sin must be punished.**

In other words, **God gives us what we deserve.**

**This is the problem** that Paul has been addressing in **Romans 1:18–32** as he highlights the **sinful rebellion of all people** and **God's righteous response** of punishing that sin.

As Paul wrote in **verse 18**, **“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”**

Paul then proceeded to **convincingly demonstrate** that all people **reject the knowledge of God** in order to **exchange the worship of God** for idols.

God's response is to **judicially abandon people to their sin** so that **sin becomes the punishment of sin**.

That is why, as Paul explains, **we see such sinful depravity** in our culture as the **perversity of human practices** is explained by God's wrathful response to sinful rebellion of men and women.

However, as Paul continues in his **larger argument** that all people need the righteousness that God gives by faith alone, as he describes it in **1:17**, he is aware that some people agree with his assessment of human rebellion **while imagining that they are the exception to the rule.**

So in **chapter two** Paul addresses those who have been listening to his description of God's punishment of idolatry and sexual immorality with **cheerful glee.**

**Paul anticipated** that there would be some who would respond to God's wrath being poured out against sinful rebellion with cheerful shouts of,

**“That’s right! Get ‘em God, get ‘em!”  
“Filthy pagans!”**

So Paul is compelled now to address those who **self-righteously and hypocritically** believe that **they are not included** in his description of God's punishment of sinful rebellion.

In other words, there are always people who believe that they will **escape the judgement of God** because they are a **“good person”** or because **they are religious.**

As we'll discover, when Paul wrote he **primarily had some of the Jews in mind** who thought that God would spare them His judgement while simultaneously judging the Gentiles.

**In our day**, Paul's rebuke is **equally applicable** to everyone who thinks they can evade God's judgement of their sin.

**In particular**, many people today believe that they will escape the condemnation of God and go to heaven when they die **because they're a good person**.

In our Western cultures, there is an **unwavering commitment** to the idea that no matter what you do, you are a **"good person."**

**This is illustrated by** the recent trial of a mother in New Zealand who murdered her three children.

**Despite the gruesome crime**, her lawyer argued that she was **not a "terrible person" but a loving mother.**<sup>4</sup>

The judge, in handing down a lenient sentence, apparently agreed with their assessment.

But that is the **same attitude** that many people have—if you had to stop someone on the street and ask them if they believed they would go to heaven when they die, most would be optimistic **because they consider themselves to be a "good person."**

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<sup>4</sup> Melanie Earley, "Lauren Dickason Trial: 'Not a Terrible Person' - Jury to Hear Defence Case for Triple Murder Accused Mum," *New Zealand Herald*, August 7, 2023, <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/lauren-dickason-trial-not-a-terrible-person-jury-to-hear-defence-case-for-triple-murder-accused-mum/BFYBZV4ODRARVBIBJBCPOZNMA/>.

A similar defence that people **place their confidence in** is that they are **“religious.”**

By this **I don't mean** that they are **faithful followers of Christ** who are committed to what **James 1:27** describes as, **“Pure and undefiled religion before our God and Father...”**

Rather, I mean that they participate in the **external rituals of religion.**

For many in our culture, this **religiosity** is focussed on the **external rituals of Christianity.**

Today many think they can **evade God's judgement of their sin** because they were **baptised as a baby, or even as an adult.**

Perhaps they believe that their **regular church attendance**, or even their **sporadic attendance** of Christmas and Easter services, is enough to make God **think of them and their sin differently.**

Paul's rebuke is just as **critically important for us** as it was for those who first received it because there are still people in our culture—**and perhaps even in our church**—that believe God will judge “good people” and religious people **differently** than He will judge the sexually immoral, idolatrous pagans.

But Paul wants us to see, just as he wanted the Jews of his day to see, that **God's justice is perfect and His judgment is impartial,** and therefore we stand **without excuse and without escape** from His judgement.

**You cannot evade the judgement of God** by being a **good person**.

**You cannot evade the judgement of God** by being **religious**, even in the externals of Christianity.

**This bad news**, though, points us back to **the good news** of the gospel as Paul describes it as **the power of God to save from the wrath of God**.

The good news is not that God will show us **favouritism** or **leniency** to escape His judgement, but that we can **escape through justification by faith alone in Christ alone**.

## PROPOSITION

As we study **Romans 2:1–3** in detail, we'll find that Paul describes **two false hopes** for **evading God's judgement**:

1. Expecting God to show **favouritism** (1)
2. Expecting God to show **leniency** (3)

## 1. EXPECTING GOD TO SHOW FAVOURITISM (1)

As we look at **verse 1**, we find that **Paul transitions** to address those who **mistakenly believe** that they were not guilty of the same sinful rebellion that he described in detail from **1:18–32**.

Paul **confronts and corrects** this wrong thinking as he writes

**Therefore you are without excuse, O man, everyone who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.**

**Now to begin with**, it is clear that Paul is **shifting the focus of his argument**, even though he is continuing to address the **larger issue of everyone's need of the gospel**.

We can see the **change in his argument** as he stops using the **third person** language of “**they**” and “**them**” in favour of the **second person singular** “**you**,” as we see here in **verse 1**.

**This signals** to us as his readers that he is turning his attention to a **different group of people**.

As he shifts his focus, it is important that we understand **not only what Paul is arguing**, but **how he is making his argument** because he is going to use the **same technique** on numerous occasions in the letter.

Paul uses a literary style called **diatribe** to communicate his argument in a convincing way.<sup>5</sup>

This was a popular way of writing in which an author **instructed his audience** by letting them **listen in on a discussion between himself and the representative of another viewpoint**.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, when we see Paul use the **second person singular “you,”** we should **NOT understand him** to be directly addressing the Roman Christians.

Anyone who holds to these **false hopes of evading God’s judgement** has not put their faith and hope in Christ, so Paul is addressing a **hypothetical unbeliever** who nevertheless thinks of himself or herself as a good person or a religious person.

**He addresses this opponent** with the words **“O man”** which is typically for the **diatribe** form of argument.

**Who was this hypothetical person though?** What do we know about this person who was meant to **represent very real people** that Paul was concerned about?

It’s clear that whoever it is, the person believes himself to be a **moral person**, or what otherwise call a **“good person.”**

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., Second Edition, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 135.

<sup>6</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *Romans, The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 71–72.

This person has heard Paul **condemning idolatry and sexual immorality** and has been **cheering him on** since they don't believe they are guilty of the same practices.

So whoever it is, this is a **self-righteous person**.

Is Paul then addressing his concern about **self-righteous Gentiles** or **self-righteous Jews**?

Paul **doesn't explicitly state** who he is addressing until **2:17** when he calls this person a "**Jew**" who **relies on the Mosaic Law and boasts in God**.

However, that **doesn't mean** we should be **hasty to restrict** Paul's rebuke only to the self-righteous Jews who were trying to establish their own righteousness through obedience to the Law.

**Consider this**—while Paul appears to have been focussing on Gentiles in **1:18–32** because of the **nature of the idolatry and immorality** he describes, and because of the **contrast with the Jews** in **chapter two**, he **never explicitly states** that he was describing Gentiles in **chapter one**.

In fact, we **may be guilty of the very same assumption** that Paul's Jewish opponent was when we **exclude the Jews from Paul's focus** in **chapter one**.

This isn't just a matter of curiosity—it's important to **understanding Paul's flow of thought**.

Out text opens with “**Therefore**,” which indicates that Paul is **building an inference** from what he has written.

However, **IF** Paul was **exclusively addressing** Gentiles in **chapter one** and shifts to **exclusively addressing** Jews in **chapter two**, then the **logic doesn't hold**.

On what basis can Paul infer the guilt of Jews by describing Gentile rebellion?

The matter is **actually simple** if we look back at **1:18** to **recall Paul's argument** there.

In **verses 18–19**, Paul makes a statement of universal rebellion  
<sup>18</sup> **For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,**  
<sup>19</sup> **because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.**

From there he **deals with ALL humans** in light of **God's natural revelation**.

**It is certainly true** that Paul described sins **typically practiced by the Gentiles**, but Paul **never intended to exclude** the Jews from the universal category of those who reject God's universal message in creation.

So as **Doug Moo** explains, we should understand Paul's use of “**Therefore**” in **verse 1** to mean, “*because God's wrath is revealed against all people, and because all people have been given knowledge of God, therefore even the person who judges is 'without excuse' before God.*”

In other words, while it is fair to say that there is a **particular emphasis** on Gentiles in **chapter one** and a **particular emphasis** on Jews in **chapter two**, it is wrong to see a hard distinction.

In fact, Paul **clearly intended Jews** to see their **own guilt** in his instruction of **chapter one**.

**As he shifts focus** at the **beginning of chapter two**, then, Paul is **deliberately keeping the language as general** as possible in order to make his **application as broad as possible**.

His argument will progress through **chapter two** to a **narrow focus on the Jews**, but here in **verses 1–3** he is aiming at **everyone who judges**.

That is, Paul in addressing **through his hypothetical opponent** everyone who is **self-righteous and judges** the sins of others while **hypocritically** overlooking their own.

There were Jews who definitely fit that description, but as **another commentator** wrote, “*Such an attitude did not characterise all Jews, nor was it unique to them.*”<sup>7</sup>

That is why we **cannot overlook Paul’s instruction** here in the opening of **chapter two** as **irrelevant to us**.

This is written to **everyone who is self-righteous**, everyone who **hypocritically judges** the sins of others, and everyone who believes that they will evade the judgement of God by being a **good person or a religious person**.

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<sup>7</sup> Frank Thielman, *Romans*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 125.

As you look back at **verse 1**, then, you can see that Paul addresses this **self-righteous person** by stating that they “**have no excuse...**”

**This links back** to **1:20** where Paul argued that everyone who **rejects God’s message in creation** is “**without excuse.**”

So Paul is **cleverly addressing anyone** who looks at the sins of idolatry and sexual immorality he described in **chapter one** and **thinks that they are not guilty** of those practices and so **expect God to judge them differently.**

**Despite their expectations** that God will hold them to a **different standard**, they are nevertheless “**without excuse**”—just like those they are judging.

That is, they are **without excuse** for **rejecting God in sinful rebellion.**

Even if your rebellion looks different than what **Romans 1** describes, **God will judge you impartially** for the sin that you do commit.

That’s the **very opposite of the hope** that the self-righteous person has, that **God will treat them with partiality.**

To put that differently, they are holding to the **false hope** that God will show them **favouritism.**

While **morally-behaved Gentiles** are guilty of this **false expectation**, it is a particular feature of **self-righteous Jews.**

We know from history that Paul was not simply addressing a hypothetical self-righteousness, but that most Jews of his day **believed that God would treat them differently** from the Gentiles, even in His response to their sins.

We find this attitude expressed in the **apocryphal book**, the **Wisdom of Solomon**.

The book is evidently **not inspired Scripture**, but it does nonetheless offer us **great insights into Jewish thinking** of the time.

For example, in the **Wisdom of Solomon 11:9–10**, we read—

*<sup>9</sup> For when they were tested, although they were being disciplined in mercy,  
they learned how the impious, being judged in anger, were tormented.*

*<sup>10</sup> For these you put to the test like a father giving a warning,  
but the others you examined like a stern king passing sentence.<sup>8</sup>*

Again in **Wisdom 12:20–22** we find—

*<sup>20</sup> For if you punished with such great care and indulgence the enemies of your servants and those deserving of death, giving them time and opportunity in which to free themselves from their wickedness,*

*<sup>21</sup> with how great carefulness have you judged your sons*

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<sup>8</sup> Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, eds., “Wisdom of Solomon,” in *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (Primary Texts), trans. Michael A. Knibb (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), Wis 11:9–10.

*to whose fathers you gave oaths and covenants of good promises!*

*<sup>22</sup> While therefore you chastise us, you scourge our enemies ten thousand times more*

*in order that, when we judge, we may think about your goodness*

*and, when we are judged, we may look for mercy.*

**Now here's the point** that Paul is making thus far in **verse 1**—no one, whether Jew or Gentile, **can legitimately claim any kind of moral superiority over another** because all are guilty of sinful rebellion, regardless of the specifics.

He will make that statement explicitly in **Romans 3:23**—  
**...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**

Therefore, **anyone who passes judgement** on others demonstrates an **inability to see their own sin accurately**.<sup>9</sup>

That is why Paul accuses everyone who **judges others in this manner** of **hypocrisy**.

As you see again in **verse 1**, **“You are without excuse, O man, everyone who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.”**

What does Paul mean by the **accusation**, **“you who judge practice the same things?”**

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Thielman, *Romans*, ZECNT, 126.

For Jews in Paul's day particularly, **many would reject the idea** that they were guilty of idolatry or the sexual immorality that **characterised the pagans**.

It is most likely that Paul was actually referring back to the vice list of **Romans 1:28-32**—

<sup>28</sup> **And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them over to an unfit mind, to do those things which are not proper,**

<sup>29</sup> **having been filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips,**

<sup>30</sup> **slanderers, haters of God, violent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,**

<sup>31</sup> **without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;**

<sup>32</sup> **and although they know the righteous requirement 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.**

As you can see, there is even a **similarity in the language** as Paul refers both there and in **2:1** to those who “**practice such things**.”

**We must ask**, though, why anyone who was hypocritically practicing these kinds of sins **would think that they could judge others for their sin?**

**For Jews particularly**, they believed that God would judge them differently **because He is partial to them**.

In other words, they were **expecting God to show them favouritism**.

At that time, Jews had the belief that **God had chosen every descendent of Israel** in **corporate election**.

They further believed that God choosing them **on the basis of their ethnicity** only needed to be combined with a **sincere intention to obey the Law** in order for them to be saved.<sup>10</sup>

However, Paul argues that by judging others they are **unwittingly agreeing** with **God's perfect standard**.

It is this same standard **by which God will judge them** and condemn them for their sin, because **God is perfect in justice** and **does not show partiality or favouritism**.

As **Deuteronomy 10:17** proclaims—

**For Yahweh your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the fearsome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe.**

Paul affirms the same in **Romans 2:11** where he says—

**For there is no partiality with God.**

And again in **Colossians 3:25**—

**For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.**

**To the self-righteous Jew** then, Paul is arguing that **God will not show him favouritism** because he is a Jew.

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<sup>10</sup> "Covenant nomism." Cf. Moo, *Romans*, NICNT, 137.

As Paul states explicitly in **Romans 3:9**—

**What then? Are we better? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin.**

So then, **whether Jew or Gentile**, anyone who is self-righteous and hypocritical in their judgement of others should know that they **cannot evade God's judgement** by hoping for Him to show them **favouritism**.

That is a **flawed view of God's justice** and, as Paul says, it is **no excuse**.

Most likely, **you are not a Jew counting on your ethnicity** and best intentions to be obedient to save you.

However, it is quite easy for you to hold onto the **same false hope** that God will show you **favouritism** because you are a **good person, or a religious person**.

In our culture it is easy to practice the **eternal rituals of Christianity**—being baptised, attending church, taking communion, reading your Bible, praying regularly, and even giving money to the church.

**None of that will save you** from the wrath of God as He judges you for **your sinful rebellion**.

**The only true hope** is what Paul **enthusiastically** referred to **in 1:17** as the **righteousness that God gives** to those who put their faith **not in religious works** but in the saving work of Jesus Christ.

**So the first false hope** for **evading God's judgement** is the **expectation that He will show you favouritism.**

Paul reminds all who are guilty of such self-righteous hypocrisy that they are **without excuse.**

**The second false hope** is **NOT** that **God will show partiality** in applying His perfect standard of justice, but that He will **show leniency by relaxing the standard.**

## 2. EXPECTING GOD TO SHOW LENIENCY (3)

Now, **verse 2** plays an **important role** in this section because it **develops Paul's thought** in **verse 1** and **sets up his thought** in **verse 3.**

The thought in **verse 2** is actually the **truth that is central** to Paul's reasoning in the **other two verses.**

In **verse 2**, Paul asserts that **God is perfect in justice and will judge impartially according to everyone's deeds.**

Look at **verse 2** again—

**And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things.**

With the words, "**And we know...**" Paul is referring to a **statement that his opponent will agree with.**

Unlike God's impartiality in verse 1, the following statement is **not disputed by the self-righteous people** that Paul is confronting and correcting.

The **central truth** that all parties agree on is that, **"the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things."**

This was **not disputed because**, as the **Septuagint** translation of **Proverbs 24:12** warns—

**know that the Lord knows the heart of all;  
and the one who formed breath for all knows all,  
the one who renders to each according to his deeds.**<sup>11</sup>

So to put it simply, **Paul affirms God's fairness in judging sin.**

**A more literal translation** of this verse helps to clarify this.

We can translate it as, **"Now we know that God's judgment is in accordance with truth..."** which is how the **NET** translates it.

In other words, **God's judgement against sin is fully in accord with the facts—it is just.**<sup>12</sup>

Or as **one commentator** put it, God's *"standard of judgment is the truth about their conduct, not whether they have joined Him in condemning others."*<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Rick Brannan, Ken M. Penner et al., *The Lexham English Septuagint*, Second Edition (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), Pr 24:12.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Moo, *Romans*, NICNT, 141.

<sup>13</sup> Thielman, *Romans*, ZECNT, 126.

**God sees the heart** and therefore has **no problem in piercing the veil of hypocrisy** to judge perfectly according to the truth.

As Solomon warns in **Ecclesiastes 12:14**—

**God will bring every work to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.**

Jesus Himself says the same in **Luke 8:17**—

**For nothing is hidden that will not become evident, nor anything secret that will not be known and come to light.**

Or as Paul writes in **1 Corinthians 4:5** that when the Lord comes, He will, **“both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and make manifest the motives of hearts.”**

While Paul’s opponent would **agree on the principle**, the **dispute** comes in regarding his **application of it to the Jews**.

That is why the **central truth of God’s perfect justice and impartial judgement** sets up **verse 3** and the **false hope of expecting God to show leniency**.

Look at **verse 3**—

**But do you presume this, O man—who passes judgment on those who practice such things and does the same—that you will escape the judgment of God?**

**The key to understanding** how Paul is **ADDING** to his argument here and **NOT simply restating** **verse 1** is the question, **“do you presume...?”**

The Greek word translated as “**presume**” means to **consider or to calculate upon** the basis of something.<sup>14</sup>

Paul’s hypothetical opponent that he is rebuking is **calculating upon the expectation** that he will escape God’s judgement.

Paul points again to the hypocrisy by accusing this **self-righteous person** of being one, “**who passes judgment on those who practice such things and does the same.**”

As Paul clearly argues, the one who **practices the very wickedness that he condemns** is **hardly the exception** to the rule that God will condemn the wicked.<sup>15</sup>

However, that is precisely what the self-righteous hypocrites believed.

**Paul questions the presumption**, the **mental calculation**, of those who held onto the hope that even if God would judge them, **He would do so leniently.**

In other words, they were **banking on God’s grace and forgiveness** for anything they had done wrong.

Paul’s question **legitimately confronts** the **Gentile moralist** who believed that he could evade God’s judgement by living a “**good**” life, but it was **particularly the Jews** who would hold onto such a **false expectation.**

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<sup>14</sup> BDAG, λογίζομαι.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Thielman, *Romans*, ZECNT, 127.

The Jewish expectation of leniency for their sins is represented in another apocryphal book, the **Psalms of Solomon**.

One again, it is **not inspired Scripture** but it is a revealing insight into the **Jewish thinking of the day**.

In **Psalms of Solomon 15:8**, the author states—

*“those who do lawlessness shall not escape the judgment of the Lord”<sup>16</sup>*

But then he goes on to argue that the **so-called “righteous”** will be **exempted from this judgement**.

That is why the Jews **particularly believed they could evade** God’s judgement even if they **“practiced such things and did the same”** as the Gentiles they despised.

Paul’s opponent would probably have **considered himself innocent**, as we’ve said, of the **idolatry and sexual immorality** of the pagan Gentiles.

However, they could **hardly argue that they were innocent** of the **unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil, envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice, gossip, slander, violence, arrogance, boastfulness, or lack of lack and mercy** that Paul condemns in **Romans 1:29–31**.

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<sup>16</sup> “Psalms of Solomon,” in *New English Translation of the Septuagint*, Ps Sol 15:8.

In fact, Paul will go on later to accuse the same Jewish opponent of **stealing, adultery, and handling goods stolen** from pagan temples as we read in **Romans 2:21-22**—

**21 You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal?**

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

So then, if **even “good people” and “religious” people** like the Jews had to admit when confronted that they were guilty of sin—even the same sins they despised in the Gentiles—**how did they still hold onto hope of evading God’s judgement?**

**In their presumption**, they believed that God might find them guilty but would end up **“letting them off the hook”** by showing them **leniency**.

As Paul will continue in **verse 4** to **rebuke**—

**Do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?**

In other words, they **expected God to be gracious and forgiving**.

**They expected leniency.**

Once again, this is a **flawed view of God’s justice**.

**There are still many of us today** who hold onto the same false hope that **God will “go easy”** on us because we’re a good person or a religious person.

It's quite easy for you to **convince yourself of this idea** when you **buy into the lie** that is so common in our culture—the lie that **God's standard is not one of perfect righteousness** but a relative standard where **good can outweigh bad**.

You've heard it many times, and perhaps **said it many times yourself** that you expect to escape God's judgment and enjoy heaven after you die because **the good things you've done outweigh the bad**.

**You know that you're not perfect**, but you believe God uses a **lenient standard** that **considers the matter on balance**.

However, Paul has already corrected that **faulty view of God's justice** in **verse 2**—**God's judgement against sin is fully in accord with the facts; it is just**.

As Jesus sates plainly in **Matthew 5:48**—

**You are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.**

James warns that God **doesn't use a sliding scale**. He does **not “grade on a curve,”** and He does not consider whether your **good deeds outweigh the bad**.

As he writes in **James 2:10**—

**Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.**

Therefore, as Paul warns in **verse 3**, those who are **self-righteous hypocrites** are not only found to be without excuse, but they are also **left without escape** from the judgement of God.

So **the second false hope** for evading God's judgement is the **expectation that He will show leniency**.

But this is a false hope because the self-righteous will find that they have **no escape from God's perfect justice**.

## CONCLUSION

**As we conclude** our study of **these three verses**, we find that Paul has **confronted and corrected** those who mistakenly believe that they are in a **different category from others**.

When Paul warned in **chapter one** that the **universal human rebellion against God** leaves all people under the just wrath of God, some people thought that they were **the exception to the rule**.

In fact, they were **so self-righteous** in how they viewed themselves that they not only **thought themselves safe** from the judgement of God, but they **joined in the judgement by condemning others**.

Paul exposed this hypocrisy because he knew that their hopes for evading the judgement of God would **prove to be as false as the hopes people hold onto today**.

**In remarkable similarity**, many today have the **same expectations as the Jews** of Paul's day.

People **expect that God will not judge** them for their sinful rebellion **because He will show them favouritism**.

People also **expect that God will not judge** them for their sinful rebellion **because He will show them leniency.**

However, as we've learnt, **neither of these offer true hope**—they are **without excuse and without escape** from God's judgement.

As Paul is establishing in his **larger argument**, the only hope that people have is in the **gospel.**

**The only hope** that **you and I have** of escaping the just condemnation of God for our sinful rebellion is **the good news of the righteousness that God** provides by faith.

That is, the **justification by faith alone in Christ alone** that Paul refers to **in 1:17.**

So just as we learnt from **Romans 1** to be **enthusiastic evangelists** of those who are **abandoned by God** to their sinful depravity, so we learn now from **Romans 2** that we should be **equally unashamed to proclaim** the gospel to the **so-called “good people” and religious people** around us.

Some of our family, friends, neighbours, and co-workers need to hear the gospel of God's salvation plan by faith alone **because their lives are being destroyed by their own sin.**

**But we have other people** that we interact with who go to **church regularly and are upstanding members of society and are wonderful, pleasant people**—they also need the gospel, as Paul says.

**Just like we need the gospel too!**

## BENEDICTION

*Now the God who is mighty,  
the Lamb who is worthy,  
and the Spirit who is near,  
fortify you to live faithfully in these days  
and all the days until Jesus comes.  
Amen.<sup>17</sup>*

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<sup>17</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *Grace Be with You: Benedictions from Dale Ralph Davis*, New Edition (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2019), 43.

Romans 2:1–3 LSB

2:1

Therefore you are without excuse, O man,

b

← everyone who passes **judgment**,

c

**for** [...] you **condemn** yourself;

d

← in that which you **judge** another,

e

← **for** you who **judge** practice the same things.

2:2

And we know that

b

← the **judgment** of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things.

2:3

But do you presume this, O man—

b

← who passes **judgment** on those who practice such things

c

← and does

d

← that you will escape the **judgment** of God?

| Inference of 1:18–32

| Describes 1a

| Reason for 1a–b

| Location/ instrument of 1c

| Reason for 1c

| Develops 1; sets up 3

| Content of 2a

| Rhetorical question (+3d)

| Describes 3a

| Content of 3a



**STEADFAST**  
BIBLE CHURCH

## Sermon Notes

### Introduction

As we study Romans 2:1–3 in detail, we'll find that Paul describes two false hopes for evading God's judgement:

1. Expecting God to show favouritism (1)
2. Expecting God to show leniency (3)

### 1. Expecting God to show favouritism (1)

» There is no excuse

### 2. Expecting God to show leniency (3)

» There is no escape

### Conclusion