

DO GOOD PEOPLE GO TO HEAVEN?

ROMANS 2:5

INTRODUCTION

Paul, who had been **set apart by God for the gospel**, had an **unbounded enthusiasm** for the good news message that he proclaimed.

He himself said so in **chapter 1, verses 16–17**, **the key verses** that **introduce the body of his letter** to the Romans.

He wrote, “**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.**”

That statement not only **introduces the gospel as the theme** of Paul’s letter, but it offers us something of an **outline for the argument** that he starts to unfold in **verse 18**.

Paul’s **unbounded enthusiasm** for the gospel was fuelled by the conviction that **everyone needs the good news** of God’s salvation, whether they’re Jewish or Gentile.

That is because, as Paul clarifies in **verse 17**, the **heart of God’s salvation plan** is **justification through faith alone**, or as Paul puts it, “**In [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith....**”

The gospel is the good news that God offers a **solution for the universal problem of man's unrighteousness** in the form of the **righteousness that He gives** to those who put their faith in Christ.

As Paul goes on to explain in **verse 18**, the good news of the gospel has **corresponding bad news** that outside of the salvation God offers in Christ, **all people are under the condemnation of God** because they reject Him in sinful rebellion.

As Paul put it, **“The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men...”**

Paul then sets out to **unfold his argument** that **all human beings, without exception**, need the salvation God offers according to the gospel.

To put it simply, **everyone needs the gospel**.

Paul's argument **follows the outline** of **verse 16** as he sets out to **convincingly demonstrate** that both Jews and Gentiles need the gospel.

From **verses 20–32 of chapter 1**, he explains that those who are **idolatrous and immoral** need God's salvation.

Since he **primarily had the Gentiles in mind**, he knew that he would also have to explain that the **Jews have an equal need** for God's salvation.

The trouble is, as Paul knew full well, it was a lot harder to **convince the unbelieving Jews** that they **needed the righteousness God offered** through faith alone in Christ alone.

You see, the problem was that the Jews of Paul's day **genuinely believed that they were the exception** and had no need for a righteousness through faith because they were **"good enough."**

Therefore, in **chapter two** Paul argues that **even good people need the gospel**, including the **unbelieving Jews who were the best example** of a self-righteousness rooted in their **ethnic identity, relative morality, and religious activity.**

When we studied **verse 4**, we considered why **people even today** believe that while they may not be perfect, they are nevertheless **"good enough" not to need the gospel.**

Just like the Jews of Paul's day, we still have countless people today who are **convinced that they will escape God's judgement**, as Paul says in **verse 3**, because they are **"good people."**

As many believe, **God won't condemn a "good person,"** and as we learnt from **verse 4**, they believe that **God's mercy and kindness towards them proves that.**

In other words, **the present experience of God's mercy** leads "good people" to believe that they **will enjoy the future experience of God's mercy** such that they will not be condemned in His final judgement.

That leads us to ask the critical question—

Do good people go to heaven?

If you were to ask a **Jew of Paul's day**, the answer would be a **very confident and self-assured “yes!”**

Let me show you—turn to Matthew 19.

Here, beginning in **verse 16**, we encounter a man that we often refer to as a **rich young ruler** based on the **parallel accounts in Mark and Luke**.

His identity is less important than how he would have answered the question, Do good people go to heaven?

Follow along as we read from **verse 16**—

¹⁶ **And behold, someone came to Him and said, “Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?”**

This young Jewish man was thinking about the question we're seeking to answer.

He was clearly **looking for assurance** that he would **go to heaven when he died** so that he would enjoy **“eternal life.”**

We can see, however, that he's building his confidence on a **false foundation** because his question is based on the belief that **he has to EARN eternal life**, not receive it by grace through faith.

Jesus exposes his false thinking that anyone can be **“good enough” to earn or merit eternal life.**

17 And He said to him, “Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.”

In **Mark 10:18**, the words are recorded slightly differently—
And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.

Jesus is exposing the **false rule or false standard** by which the young man wants to **measure himself**.

No one can be “good enough” because the **rule or standard against which everyone will be measured is God**, who is perfect in His goodness and righteousness.

Since the young man doesn't recognise his **own self-righteousness**, **Jesus exposes his belief** that he is “good enough” to go to heaven.

18 Then he said to Him, “Which ones?” And Jesus said, “You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness;

19 Honour your father and mother; and You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”

20 The young man said to Him, “All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?”

As you can see, the rich young ruler **sincerely believed that he was a “good person”** who was **well on his way to earning his entrance** into heaven when he died.

However, Jesus goes on to **expose his wrong thinking** and show him that he was **holding onto a false assurance**.

21 **Jesus said to him, “If you wish to be complete [or ‘perfect’], go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”**

22 **But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property.**

To be clear, Jesus is **not saying that anyone can earn eternal life** through radical generosity or any other good deeds, but He is **laying this man’s idolatry bare**.

As Jesus had taught in the Sermon on the Mount, we read in **Matthew 6:24** that, **“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”**

This rich young man thought he was a **“good person”** who would be going to heaven, even though he had **exchanged the worship of God for the worship of wealth**.

Like all self-righteous people, **he was also a hypocrite**— he believed he was keeping all God’s commandments while **breaking the very first**, as we find it in **Exodus 20:3**—
“You shall have no other gods before Me.”

As Jesus will go on to teach in **Matthew 22:37-38**—

37 **‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’**

[Deuteronomy 6:5]

38 **This is the great and foremost commandment.**

The rich young ruler **did not love God with all his heart, soul, and mind.**

Instead, he had made an **idol out of his money** and in that way had put a **false god before Yahweh** in his heart.

Despite this, he **earnestly believed** that even if he was not perfect, he was **“good enough” to escape the condemnation** of God and be welcomed into heaven to enjoy eternal life.

That is the **perfect illustration** of the **hard-hearted self-righteousness that Paul was confronting** in **Romans chapter 2**, especially as he encountered it among his fellow Jews.

Paul knew that **countless people hold the earnest belief** that they are **“good enough” to escape the condemnation** of God and be welcomed into heaven to enjoy eternal life.

Whatever that self-righteousness is based on, **whether ethnic identity, relative morality, or religious activity**, Paul is arguing in **Romans 2** that **no one is good enough to escape the judgement of God.**

Therefore, **all human beings, without exception, need the salvation God offers** according to the gospel.

In the course of this argument, Paul is going to **answer the question before us**, Do good people go to heaven?

PROPOSITION

As we come now to study **Romans 2:5** in detail, we'll discover that Paul answers the question, **Do good people go to heaven?**, with an **emphatic, "No!"**

Rather, Paul makes it clear that **good people need the righteousness God offers** through faith alone because, **without Christ, good people go to hell.**

So then, as we study **Romans 2:5**, Paul will give **three substantiations for the answer** that good people **do NOT go to heaven:**

1. The reasons for God's wrath
2. The revelation of God's wrath
3. The rule of God's wrath

1. THE REASONS FOR GOD'S WRATH

As Paul writes **verse 5**, he begins with a **contrast between the delusional thinking** of good people in **verse 4** and the **reality** of God's judgement they will face as Paul describes in **verse 5**.¹

Look at **verse 5**—

But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself...

¹ Cf. Frank Thielman, *Romans*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 128.

You can see that Paul is **contrasting verses 4 and 5** with the **“But”—the contrasting conjunction** between the two sentences.

Remember that in **verse 4**, Paul was **confronting and correcting the misunderstanding of God’s mercy** that many good people hold to.

People misunderstand the **present experiences of God’s kindness and mercy** to mean that **they will NEVER face the wrath of God.**

This is **delusional thinking** because, as Paul explained, the **purpose of God’s mercy** is not to communicate His approval of your self-righteousness, but to offer you the **opportunity to turn** and accept the righteousness He offers through faith.

As Paul writes in **verse 4**, **“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?”**

Now contrary to this false confidence, Paul states that the reality is that all unbelievers, even unbelieving “good people,” will face a **future and final judgement of God** in which He will pour out His wrath in just punishment of sin.

You can see that he refers to this reality in **verse 5** when he states, **“You are storing up wrath for yourself....”**

To be clear, there is a **distinction** between the wrath that unbelievers experience presently as God **judicially abandons** them to their sin, and the wrath that they will experience in the **future and final judgement of God.**

The miscalculation that “good people” make is that because they are not experiencing this present wrath in the same way as others, **they must be right with God.**

Paul wants his readers to understand that **God's merciful delay in judging sin** does not mean that good people will not experience His wrath because **any delay is only temporary.**

There is actually a **great sense of irony** in how Paul uses the idea of “**storing up.**”

When the term is used **literally**, it means to *deposit something valuable, to put something in reserve for safekeeping, to gather treasure, or accumulate riches.*²

In **1 Corinthians 16:2**, Paul uses the word to refer to a believer “**saving whatever he has prospered**” so that he can give generously to the needs of poor Christians.

When the term is used **figuratively**, as Paul is using here, it means *to do something that will bring about a future event or condition.*³

You might already have thought of the way in which Jesus used the word in **Matthew 6:20** when He said, “**Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal.**”

² Franco Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*, ed. Madeleine Goh and Chad Schroeder (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2015), θησαυρίζω.

³ BDAG, θησαυρίζω.

The future event that Paul is referring to here in **Romans 2** is **God's wrathful judgement of sin**.

So rather ironically, instead of living in such a way that they **should expect a future reward**, Paul is explaining that “good people” will **actually experience a future punishment**.

James uses the idea in the same way when he speaks of **unbelieving rich people** who were professing to be Christians while defrauding their labourers of their wages.

He writes in **James 5:3**, “**Your gold and your silver have rusted, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. You have stored up such treasure in the last days!**”

Now, thus far in our study of **verse 5**, we can see that Paul has established the **REALITY of God's future, wrathful judgement** of good people.

What we want to consider, though, are the **REASONS for God's wrath**.

That is plain to see now as we look back at **verse 5**—
Because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself....

Paul's use of the word “**because**” indicates to us that he is **providing the reason(s)**.⁴

⁴ “Often the norm is at the same time the reason, so that in accordance with and because of are merged.” BDAG, κατά, 58.

Before we consider the reason that Paul provides here in **verse 5**, we should remember that there are **already two reasons** he has provided in the context of **chapter 2, verses 1–4**.

❖ **The first reason** that good people will experience God's future judgement is that they are **guilty of sinful rebellion**.

Look at **verse 1**, Paul says at the end that, **“You who judge practice the same things.”**

As we learnt, even the most religious and relatively moral Jew was **guilty of at least some of the sins** Paul described in **chapter 1**.

Though the Jews would have protested that they were **innocent of idolatry and sexual immorality**, it was **undeniable that they were guilty of some of the social sins** Paul listed in **Romans 1:29-31**—

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

³⁰ **slanderers, haters of God, violent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,**

³¹ **without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful**

Moreover, **despite their protests**, Paul would likely have argued that they were **guilty of idolatry and immorality too**.

Just like the rich young ruler who professed to worship Yahweh but loved his wealth so much that it had become his idol, the Jews were just as guilty of sin as the Gentile pagans.

The same is true today of those who reject Christ while believing that they are **“good enough”** to go to heaven when they die.

If you do not receive God’s salvation that He offers in the gospel through faith, then you will experience God's future judgement because you are **guilty of sinful rebellion**.

You may protest like the Jews of Paul’s day that you are a “good person” who **practices religion and lives a moral life**, but as Jesus pointed out to the rich young ruler, only God is good.

Paul is going to elaborate on this in great detail later in his argument, but lets take a sneak peak and **turn** to **Romans 3**.

Look at **verses 10–12**—

¹⁰ **“THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;**

¹¹ **THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;**

¹² **ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME WORTHLESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.”**

Paul puts it plainly in **verse 23**—

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

❖ **The second reason** that good people will experience God's future judgement is that they are **guilty of hypocritical judgement**.

Turn back to **chapter 2** and look at **verse 3** where Paul states, **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?**

Not only was the judgment that the Jews passed on the pagan Gentiles **utterly hypocritical** because they practised themselves what they condemned in others, but their judgment **proved that they knew the law of God and wilfully rejected it**.

Let's take **another sneak peak** ahead in Paul's argument as we see him address this in **Romans 2:21-23**—

21 You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? 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?

23 You who boast in the Law, through your transgression of the Law, do you dishonour God?

Once again, **the same is true of today** of those who refuse the righteousness of God through faith because they believe they have a **righteousness of their own** that is “good enough.”

If you are not justified through faith according to the gospel, then **you will experience God's future judgement** because you are **guilty of hypocritical judgement**.

All people have the **basic law of God written on their hearts** in what the Bible calls the **conscience**.

You can see Paul refer to that in **Romans 2:14-15**—

14 For when Gentiles who do not have the Law naturally do the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves,

15 in that they demonstrate the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them.

If you look at others and judge their immoral behaviour then you **prove that you're aware of God's moral standard**.

Therefore, as Paul argued in **verse 1**, **"In that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things."**

So, **the first reason** that good people will experience God's future judgement is that they are **guilty of sinful rebellion**, and **the second reason** is that they are **guilty of hypocritical judgement**.

That brings us now to **the third reason** as Paul explains in **verse 5**.

Look again at the **verse** as Paul writes—

Because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself....

❖ **So the third reason** that good people will experience God's future judgement is that they are **guilty of refusing to repent**.

Paul is describing the **state of a “good” person’s heart**.

It's worth remembering that when we read of an author using the term **“heart”** in Scripture, **they are not referring to the centre of our emotions alone—as if the heart is contrasted with the mind** as the centre of rational thought and reason.⁵

Rather, the term **“heart”** in Scripture refers to the **controlling centre of a person**.

It is one of many terms used to describe the **inner person** and is composed of the **mind** and what we know, the **desires** and what we love, as well as the **will** and what we choose.⁶

Here, Paul describes the state of a “good” person’s heart as being **so determined to rebel against God** in sin that there is a **hardened refusal to repent**.

⁵ “The articular noun ἡ καρδία (‘the heart’) is used here, as often in the NT, in an all-inclusive sense to mean not only the human faculty of thought (‘the mind’), but also the full scope of a person’s will, emotions, desires, and general disposition.” Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 250.

⁶ “The heart is the governing center of a person. When used simply, it reflects the unity of our inner being, and when used comprehensively, it describes the complexity of our inner being—as composed of mind (what we know), desires (what we love), and will (what we choose).” A. Craig Troxel, *With All Your Heart: Orienting Your Mind, Desires, and Will toward Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 21.

When he describes the **rebellion of relatively moral, religiously active people** as “**stubborn**” and “**unrepentant**,” he is **using two terms to provide a fuller description** of this rebellious state.⁷

The first term describing the rebellious state of a good person’s heart is “**stubborn**,” or as it is translated more **literally, “hard,” as in, hardness of heart.**⁸

A hard heart resists change, especially that change of turning away from sin towards God.

That is clarified and emphasised by **the second term** describing the rebellious state of a good person’s heart—**“unrepentant.”**

In other words, Paul is emphasising the “good” person’s **refusal to repent** and **receive God’s salvation through faith.**

Once again, unbelieving Jews were the **clearest illustration** of this **hardened, stubborn refusal to repent.**

In **Ezekiel 3:7**, God states that **Israel was not willing to listen** to Him and then goes on to add, **“Surely the whole house of Israel is stubborn with a strong forehead and stiff heart.”**

Even in Paul’s day, the unbelieving Jews remained the **most stubborn and unwilling to turn from their sin** towards God to receive the salvation offered in the gospel.

⁷ Cf. John D Harvey, Romans, ed. Andreas J Köstenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough, *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* (B&H, 2017), 56.

⁸ BDAG, σκληρότης.

Turn quickly to Acts 19.

Look at verse 8 as Paul preaches the gospel in the synagogue in Ephesus—

After he entered the synagogue, he continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God.

What was the response of the religious Jews?

Verse 9 records—

But when some were becoming hardened and were not believing, speaking evil of the Way before the multitude, he left them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.

Turn a few pages to chapter 28 as we find one of the clearest examples of this rebellion in response to Paul's ministry of the gospel.

Follow along as we begin reading in verse 23—

²³ And when they had set a day for Paul, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly bearing witness about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening.

²⁴ And some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others were not believing.

²⁵ And when they disagreed with one another, they began leaving after Paul had spoken one word, "The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers,

²⁶ **saying [Isaiah 6:9–10], ‘GO TO THIS PEOPLE AND SAY, “YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; AND YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE;**

²⁷ **FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, AND WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES; LEST THEY MIGHT SEE WITH THEIR EYES, AND HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I HEAL THEM.”’**

You can turn back to **Romans 2** as we consider that there are **still countless people today** who think they are “good enough” not to need the salvation offered to them in the gospel.

Therefore, they not only rebel in sin, but they **“double down” on their rebellion** by hardening their hearts and **committing to their own self-righteousness** instead of repenting in order to receive the righteousness of God through faith.

You see, it’s not just that you have continued in your sin as a **matter of ignorance**, but that **you have rejected God’s mercy** which is designed to lead you to repentance.

In short, Paul is describing a **wilful rejection of the gospel** because, as we’ve learnt from previous sermons in this series, **God requires that you respond to the gospel with faith and repentance.**

Without the salvation that God offers according to the gospel, **you will face the wrathful judgment of God** for your sin.

You will not go to heaven, even if you consider yourself a “good person.”

The reasons for God's wrath are the first substantiation that Paul offers for the answer that good people do not go to heaven but will instead face God's future judgement.

As we've learnt, Paul has provided three reasons:

1. Good people are guilty of sinful rebellion.
2. Good people are guilty of hypocritical judgement.
3. Good people are guilty of refusing to repent.

It is this final reason that Paul has described for us here in verse 5.

These reasons for God's wrath are the first substantiation that Paul offers, but his second has to do with the certainty of a future day of judgement for all.

2. THE REVELATION OF GOD'S WRATH

As Paul continues in his explanation of verse 5, we get a better understanding of the irony in good people "storing up" their punishment while perhaps even falsely and foolishly expecting to receive a reward.

Paul writes, "Because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

It's not treasure that good people are storing up—it's God's wrath.

You can imagine the irony of a man foolishly hoarding illegal fireworks in his garage, greedily storing them up for the day he expects to have a firework display to celebrate his shrewdness.

Then in an instant, while he is looking for a place to set down his latest treasure of newly acquired fireworks, a spark accidentally ignites all the fireworks stored up so that they explode, killing him in the most unexpected and ironic twist of events.

That is the kind of ironic twist that Paul pictures as he describes the wrath of God suddenly and unexpectedly bursting forth to consume the “good person.”

Now, as we look at verse 5 again, the word “and” DOESN'T signify that Paul is referring to two different concepts of “wrath” and “revelation.”

Rather, we should understand the second phrase to be further describing the first.

We could translate it then as, “you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.”⁹

This is the second time Paul has referred to the revelation of God's wrath.

⁹ Longenecker, *Romans*, NIGTC, 250.

Look back at **chapter one, verse 18** for the **first**—

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness

In this first instance, we've learnt that Paul is referring to the **present wrath of God** against those who reject Him, primarily in the form of **His judicial abandonment** as He gives people over to their sin.

However, from what we have learnt here in **chapter 2**, it is clear that **God does not always respond** to human rebellion with **immediate and unrestrained wrath**.

As was the case with the **religious but unbelieving Jews** of Paul's day, they were **experiencing God's kindness and mercy** as **verse 4** confirms.

It was for that reason that they held onto a **false confidence** that they would not experience the second revelation of God's wrath.

This future wrath of God is what Paul refers to in **verse 5** as **"the day of wrath."**

This is the **"day"** referred to in the Old Testament as **"the day of the Lord"** or **"the day of Yahweh."**

For instance, we read in **Isaiah 13:9**—

**Behold, the day of Yahweh is coming,
Cruel, with fury and burning anger,
To make the land a desolation;
And He will exterminate its sinners from it.**

This “**day of Yahweh**” refers to **two eschatological events**—**the first** being a period of wrathful judgment at the **end of the seven-year Tribulation period**, **and the second** being a final period of wrathful judgement at the **end of the 1000-year millennial period**.¹⁰

Based on the **context of final judgement**, we should understand Paul to be referring to the **second event**.

Paul is referring in **verse 5** to the **final judgment of God’s enemies** that comes at the **Great White Throne at the end of the Millennium**.

Turn to **Revelation 20** as we briefly look at John’s description of this **terrifying event**.

Follow along as we read from **verse 11**—

11 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sits upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them.

12 Then I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.

13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them, and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds.

¹⁰ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 907.

Cf. Richard L. Mayhue, “The Bible’s Watchword: Day of the Lord,” *MSJ* 22, no. 1 (2011): 65–88.

14 **Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.**

15 **And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.**

As you turn back to **Romans 2**, keep that **terrifying picture in your mind** as we consider that Paul is referring to that event as **the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.**

This substantiates the answer that good people do not go to heaven because as Paul explains, **the future that God promises to everyone outside of Christ is not heaven, but hell.**

So how would Paul answer the question, **Do good people go to heaven?**

He would answer with an **emphatic "No!"** and then go to **elaborate that good people go to hell.**

Though Paul had the unbelieving Jews of his day in mind, it is **just as true of everyone today** who rejects Christ, who remains **confident in their own "goodness"** or righteousness so that they refuse to repent and receive the righteousness that God gives through faith alone.

If you are one such "good person," you must realise that **not only are you not going to heaven**, but you are, in fact, **going to hell when you die.**

You will most certainly not escape the judgement of God, and as **Revelation 20** indicates, this future, wrathful punishment of sin is **the most terrifying circumstance you will ever face.**

Hell is the eternal, conscious torment of sinners under the wrath of God.

You will NOT go to heaven, even if you consider yourself a **“good person.”**

There is absolutely nothing in your **ethnic identity, relative morality, or religious activity** to save you from God’s punishment of your sin.

So then, the revelation of God’s wrath is **the second substantiation** that Paul offers for the answer that good people do not go to heaven but will instead face God’s future judgement.

The third and final substantiation has to do with the **standard of God’s justice** which makes **the future judgement of “good people” an absolute certainty.**

3. THE RULE OF GOD'S WRATH

As we've established in our previous studies of **Romans chapter 2**, **"good people" misjudge two aspects** of who God is—they misunderstand **God's justice**, as Paul argued in **verses 1–3**, and they misunderstand **God's mercy**, as he argued in **verse 4**.

It is the aspect of **God's justice, or His righteousness**, that makes the future judgement of "good people" an **absolute certainty**.

Since God is righteous in who He is, He will always and justly punish disobedience to His moral standards.¹¹

Paul refers to the **righteousness of God** that **demands the righteousness of His judgment of sin**.

Notice as you look again at **verse 5**, Paul describes the future judgement of God as His **"righteous judgement."**

We should understand, then, that the perfection of who God is **makes two things absolutely certain**:

1. **God will punish all sin, without exception.**
2. **God will punish sin perfectly, without compromise.**

That is what it means for **God's future judgement** to be **"righteous."**

This is the **rule, or measure, or standard** of God's wrath.

¹¹ Cf. Gregg R. Allison, "Righteousness," in *The Baker Compact Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2016), 185.

God's wrathful punishment of sin will **measured against who He is**—since He is perfect in righteousness, **the rule of His judgement is that it too will be perfect in righteousness.**

“Good people” believe that they are “good enough” and base that **hypocritical self-righteousness** on their **ethnic identity, relative morality, and religious activity.**

However, **God's standard is absolute perfection**, as Jesus said in **Matthew 5:48**, **“You are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”**

Everyone who **falls short of that standard** will have their sin judged, **either on the cross or in hell for eternity.**

Turn quickly to **Romans 3** as we see Paul explain that God can offer salvation through faith to sinners **while still maintaining His perfect righteousness.**

Beginning in **verse 23**, Paul writes—

²³ **For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,**
²⁴ **being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;**
²⁵ **whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith, for a demonstration of His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed.**

To put it simply, **the only way to escape God's judgment is for it to fall on Someone else.**

When Jesus died on the cross as a **substitute for His people**, God poured out all His wrath against their sins **on Jesus.**

Therefore, God can offer you salvation from His wrath while **maintaining His perfect righteousness** since **the sins were justly punished on the cross.**

However, **if you reject the salvation God offers you** according to the gospel, then the only other way for God to **righteously punish your sin** is by **pouring out His wrath on you in hell.**

If you are a “good person,” **that may take you by surprise** one day **if you do no repent and receive** God’s salvation through faith.

In **Luke 16**, Jesus tells a parable of a rich man who was **surprised to find that he did not go to heaven**, but was **going to be punished eternally** in the conscious torment of hell.

In his **unrelenting agony under God’s wrath**, the man cries out to Abraham in heaven to send someone, as **Luke 16:24** says, **“so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.”**

Though it is clear that **good people do NOT go to heaven**, that does not mean that many good people are not **still EXPECTING to go to heaven.**

If you are a “good person” **still clinging to that expectation**, **learn from Jesus’ parable and Paul’s instruction** that God’s present mercy **may give way to His future wrath** at any moment.

Therefore, **repent, turn from your sin and your self-righteousness to receive** the salvation God offers in the gospel.

The righteousness that God gives through faith alone is the **only way to escape His wrath** and **go to heaven to enjoy eternal life**.

As we established from **Romans chapter 2, verse 5**, these **two things absolutely certain**:

1. **God will punish all sin, without exception.**
2. **God will punish sin perfectly, without compromise.**

It is this rule of God's wrath that **substantiates** the answer that good people **do NOT go to heaven**, but will instead face God's future judgement in hell.

The rule of God's wrath is the **third substantiation**, and along with **the other two**—

the reasons for God's wrath and
the revelation of God's wrath

—we can see why Paul would answer the question, **Do good people go to heaven?** with an **emphatic, “No!”**

CONCLUSION

As we conclude, the **final question is**, What are you to do with Paul's instruction if you have already responded to the gospel with repentance and faith?

Remember that Paul is arguing with a **hypothetical, unbelieving Jew** **in order to instruct the believers** in the church of Rome.

Just like them, you need to **safeguard the gospel** from **false ideas that turn it into a false message**.

One of the greatest attacks on the gospel in our day is a **rejection of God's future judgement** of sin in the conscious torment of hell.

Though it's highly offensive to our culture, you need to safeguard the gospel by **unapologetically answering the question**, Do good people go to heaven? in the same way Paul did, **with an emphatic "No!"** that **calls "good people" to repent and receive** God's salvation from His wrath through faith alone.

BENEDICTION

*Now may God be your exceeding joy,
Christ your only hope,
the Holy Spirit your unfailing comforter
in all your worship, in all your work,
in all your troubles until Jesus comes.
Amen.¹²*

¹² Dale Ralph Davis, *Grace Be with You: Benedictions from Dale Ralph Davis*, New Edition (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2019), 54.

2:1	Therefore you are without excuse, O man, ↳ everyone who passes judgment , for [...] you condemn yourself; ↳ in that which you judge another, ↳ for you who judge practice the same things.	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 Rhetorical question Describes 4a Reason for 4a–d Reason for 5b Contrast to 3–4 Time of 5b
2:2	And we know that ↳ the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things.	
2:3	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?	
2:4	Or 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? ↳ But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart ↳ you are storing up wrath for yourself ↳ in the day of wrath ↳ and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,	
2:5		

Sermon Notes

Introduction

As we study Romans 2:5, Paul will give three substantiations for the answer that “good people” do NOT go to heaven:

1. The reasons for God's wrath
2. The revelation of God's wrath
3. The rule of God's wrath

1. The reasons for God's wrath

- a. “Good people” are guilty of sinful rebellion.
- b. “Good people” are guilty of hypocritical judgement.
- c. “Good people” are guilty of refusing to repent.

2. The revelation of God's wrath

3. The rule of God's wrath

- a. God will punish all sin, without exception.
- b. God will punish sin perfectly, without compromise.

Conclusion