

**The Book of Romans**  
**Getting What We Deserve (Part 1)**

Romans 2:6-10

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This week many of us watched in horror, the cell phone video of a police officer shooting an unarmed fleeing black man. Immediately there were cries for justice. Protesters carried signs saying, “No justice, no peace.” Now, we understand that sentiment, all of us understand that sentiment, because we all grow angry when we conclude that justice has not been done. And it’s right that we should want justice to be done.

It’s right because God our Creator is a being of perfect justice. He announced this about Himself in Exodus 34:7. He says, “I will by no means leave the guilty unpunished.” God said I am a god of absolutely perfect justice. So our human desire for justice, sometimes flawed, is nevertheless a reflection of what theologians would call the image of God, even stamped into fallen man.

However, when it comes to our own sins and crimes most people don’t really want justice. Instead, we want to be able to sin with impunity, commit crimes with impunity, and get away with it, and people will go to great lengths to do so. You have read, I’m sure, as I have, ludicrous excuses and elaborate plans that people concoct. Whether the infraction is against their family, a friend, a co-worker, or the government, people make amazingly creative plans to escape justice. Most people, I think, even convince themselves that God isn’t even aware of everything they do. They really have, I think, this idea that somehow some of the things escape His notice, whether He doesn’t see in secret or whether He’s just too busy with other people and things to notice me.

But God doesn’t need someone with a cell phone nearby to capture our sins on video so that He doesn’t miss anything. He sees everything. He remembers everything. And ultimately, He will decide each person’s case based solely on the evidence. What evidence? The evidence of our thoughts, our motives, our words, and our actions. In other words, what the Bible collectively calls our works or our deeds.

Now let me be clear at the outset, in the case of those of us who have believed in Jesus Christ, who have repented of our sins and who follow Jesus as Savior and Lord, in our case Jesus got what we deserved and we get what He deserves. But for every other human being, for every person outside of Christ, they will get exactly what they deserve. No more, no less. That’s the point that Paul makes in Romans 2.

Now again, reminding you of the flow of the letter so far, the first 17 verses of this letter are Paul's introduction. He ends that introduction in verses 16 and 17 of chapter 1 by introducing the theme, which is the gospel. That's the point of this letter. After that brief introduction Paul sets out to show everyone needs the gospel. All of humanity needs the gospel he preaches and so he launches these two indictments that are completely comprehensive of all humanity.

The first indictment comes in chapter 1 verses 18 to 32. It is an indictment of pagan humanity, those who are lost in their idolatry. The second indictment begins in chapter 2 verse 1, runs to chapter 3 verse 8. It is an indictment of the Jews and all who claim to have a connection to the true God, but are in fact lost in self-righteousness. Paul's point here in these two massive indictments is to lump all of humanity together and to pronounce them all guilty, and therefore in need of the gospel.

Now, the heart of Paul's indictment of the Jews and of religious people comes in chapter 2, and chapter 2 points out that the Jews and all moral religious people need the gospel and they need it for three reasons. We're examining the first reason, found in the first 16 verses of chapter 2 and it's this, we need the gospel because knowing what is sinful and condemning it in others will not allow you to escape God's wrath. This is the message of the first 16 verses. You see, in verse 1 of chapter 2 he says, you who say amen to what I said about the pagans in chapter 1, you do the same things. The Jews were committing the same sins as the pagans.

The key to this paragraph is in verse 3. Even though they were committing the same sins, they had concluded that they would escape God's judgment, unlike the pagans. Now, how do you come to that mistaken conclusion? Well, it's because they had flawed views about God and Paul sets out here to correct their flawed views about God so they know that knowing what's sinful and condemning in others is not going to allow them to escape.

So far we've seen that he's corrected a flawed view of God's justice in verses 1 to 3. The heart of 1 to 3 is verse 2 where he says, notice the marginal note, that the justice or the judgment of God is always "according to truth." The second flawed view that he has corrected so far is in verses 4 and 5. It's a flawed view of God's common grace. They thought because of all the blessings that they had received, that must mean that God was okay with them and that it would turn out all right at the judgment. But Paul says, no, the opposite is true. God has done good to you. He showered you with His common grace to lead you from your rebellion to repentance.

Now, today we come to a third flawed view of God that causes religious people to think that they will escape God's justice. It is a flawed view of God's judgment. That is, of what He will do at the final judgment. We see this in verses 6 through 16. Now, to correct their flawed view of God's judgment, Paul lays out for us in these verses several foundational principles by which God will actually render His judgment on every human life. This is what God's coming judgment will look like, he says, and in so doing he corrects their flawed thinking.

Let me give you a, sort of, outline of what we will see in verses 6 to 16 and then we'll begin to work our way through it. Obviously, this outline will take us several weeks to work through. First of all, God's judgment will be, in verses 6 to 10, according to our deeds. It will be according to our deeds. Secondly, in verse 11, it will be without partiality. And then, thirdly, in verses 12 to 15, it will be according to God's Law, whether that Law is written in the Scripture or whether it's written on the heart. And then fourthly, God's judgment will be according to our hearts. Verse 16, not only will God use our deeds to judge, but He will use our thoughts and our motives as well, the secret things, as Paul calls them. So now let's go back and work our way through this.

The first principle of God's judgment, the first standard of God's judgment, is that it will be according to our deeds. We see this in verses 6 through 10. Let me read it for you. Romans 2 and let me get a running start, look back at verse 5, Paul ends verse 5 by talking about the coming day of judgment, the judgment of God, and then verse 6,

who, [*that is, God,*] WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

Now, the structure of that little paragraph is very clear. In verse 6 the principle is stated and then in verses 7 through 10 the principle is explained for us. So let's look first at the principle stated. Verse 6 says this, "God will RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS." The principle couldn't be any clearer. Now, obviously this verse doesn't begin a new sentence; it's a continuation of Paul's thought. You can see that in how it begins, it's a dependent clause. In verse 5, as I noted for you, Paul has just referenced the final day of judgment of unbelievers. What follows in verses 6 through 16 is how God will judge those who stand before Him at that judgment.

Now let's take verse 6 apart. Paul makes several points here in verse 6, this principle of judgment according to our deeds. He makes several points about that judgment of unbelievers that are not his main point, but I want to point them out to you regardless. First of all, notice that the judgment is certain. Verse 6 says, "God WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON." The Greek word for render means, to give, to pay back, to return. In the case of good behavior that meets the standard, reward. In the case of behavior that fails to meet the standard, recompense or punishment. In response to every human life God will either reward or punish. Let that settle into your mind for a moment. You will gain either reward or punishment.

Now, notice that the judgment will be not only certain, but individual. Verse 6 says, “God WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON.” The final judgment will not be some sort of national judgment. You don’t get in because you belong to what, at one time, was called a Christian nation. It won’t be a family judgment. You don’t get to hide under the coattails of godly parents or grandparents. It’s each person. It’s sobering to think about it, but understand this, you, you will stand before God your Creator and so will I. It’s not a question of whether you will stand before Jesus Christ in judgment, rather it’s a question of which judgment will you stand before God in.

If you’ve repented of your sins, if you put your faith in Jesus Christ, you will stand before Jesus as Lord at what Paul calls in 2 Corinthians 5:10, “the judgment seat of Christ.” This will take place after the rapture of the church and before the second coming, in heaven, while what the Bible calls the great tribulation is unfolding here on Earth, the judgment seat of Christ.

If you have not truly repented, if you are not a true follower of Jesus, then you will stand before Jesus Christ at what the Apostle John calls the “great white throne” in Revelation 20. That will happen after the thousand years of Jesus’s earthly reign, the millennium as it’s called. All the unbelieving dead will be resurrected; their souls will have spent all of that time in what Jesus calls Hell or Gehenna, a place that He describes as burning with fire and “where THE WORM DOESN’T DIE AND, THE FLAME IS NOT QUENCHED.” But at the time of the final judgment their souls will be raised from that environment, united with a resurrected body that can endure all of eternity, and they will face the great white throne of judgment, they will stand before Jesus Christ.

Now, here in this text the primary reference is not to the judgment of believers at the judgment seat of Christ, but rather to the great white throne of judgment, because if you look at chapter 2 verses 1 to 5 clearly he’s talking about unbelievers and what they will face. So, the judgment is certain, the judgment is individual.

Notice, the judgment is also universal. Verse 6 says, “God WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON,” not only to the individual, but the point is, to every person without exception. This will be required attendance, compulsory, unavoidable. John says in Revelation 20, “he saw all the dead, small and great, standing” at that judgment. As certainly as death is coming for most of us, if the Lord doesn’t return, every person will stand before God.

Now that brings us to the heart of verse 6 and to Paul’s main point. Those are not his main point. Here’s his main point. The judgment will be evidential. That is, it will be based solely on the evidence. Verse 6 says, “God WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS,” in keeping with that person’s works, that person’s deeds. In other words, God’s verdict will be a perfect reflection of the collective evidence of our lives. What evidence? Well, our thoughts, our motives, our words, and our actions, all together provide the evidence. God will issue His verdict on every life and the evidence that He will use to determine guilt will be the moral actions of each person. It’ll be with the evidence.

Now, it's really important to understand that the standard of God's judgment is not according to your ethnic identity. That's what the Jews thought. They thought because they were descendants of Abraham they were in. That doesn't get you in. That's Paul's point here. Your religious heritage is not the standard of judgment. Again, this was their confidence. They looked at all of the prophets and the men who had gone before and said, we stand in their line. God's not going to use that standard. He's also not going to use the standard of the person you think you are, He's not going to use the standard of the person others think you are, and He's not going to use the standard of who you wish you were. These are all standards that we wish God would use, but instead God's standard of judgment will be in perfect conformity to the person He knows you to be. That's what Paul is saying.

Now, notice that much of verse 6 is in all capitals in our English translations. That's because the translators want to point out that the New Testament writer is directly quoting from the Old Testament. And here Paul is probably quoting two Old Testament texts. In fact, your English Bible may have a marginal note pointing you to these two passages. The first one is Psalm 62:12, "You recompense a man according to his work." And Proverbs 24:12, in the context there, there's injustice happening, and in Proverbs 24:12, "If you say, 'See, we did not know this,' does He not consider *it* who weighs the hearts?" In other words, you can say, I didn't know, but he says, God knows the heart, God knows your thoughts, and "does He not know *it* who keeps your soul? And will he not render to man according to his work?"

So understand then, work is more than just your actions. Works, your works, your deeds, is the collective of all of your thoughts, your motives, your attitudes, your words, your actions. That's the standard. But this crucial principle, or standard, of God's judgment is not taught just in one or two passages in the Old Testament. It fills both Testaments.

I went through many different passages this week. Let me just give you a sampling from the Old Testament and the New. Turn with me to Jeremiah, Jeremiah 17:9, a very famous verse talking about the fallen, unbelieving heart, "'The heart is more deceitful than all else. It is desperately sick; who can understand it.'" It's terminally ill, who can understand it. The answer comes in the next verse. "'I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind,'" and as a result of that, "'I give to each man according to his ways.'" God says, listen, I don't just look at your behavior. I search your heart and I will give you what you deserve based on what's going on in your heart, and "'according to the results of your deeds.'"

Turn over to Jeremiah 32, Jeremiah 32:19. Jeremiah is in the middle of a prayer here and he says this about God in Jeremiah 32:19, "You are great in council, mighty in deed, Your eyes are open to all the ways of the sons of men, and You give to everyone according to his ways," his predictable patterns of behavior, "and according to the fruit of his deeds." This is how God works. He always acts on the evidence. He always acts with perfect justice. In Matthew 16:27 Jesus is talking about the second coming and He says, "'the Son of man is going to come in the

glory of His Father with His angels and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS.’” That’s Jesus saying what will happen when He returns.

Turn to Revelation, Revelation 20. John is here talking about the great white throne of judgment, that future judgment of unbelievers at the end of the thousand-year reign of Christ when all the dead unbelievers are resurrected. Verse 12, Revelation 20, “I saw the dead, the small and the great, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which was the book of life;” that’s the Lamb’s book of life where all of those who are in Christ are written, “and the unbelieving dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.”

God has a record of all of these things. It may be written out, as it’s described here in this language, or this may simply be representative of the fact that it is permanently recorded in the mind of God, who never forgets anything unless He chooses to forget it, as He does with the sins of those who have trusted in His Son. “Judged according to their deeds.” Turn over to chapter 22. The Bible ends on this message. Revelation 22:12, Jesus says, “Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward *is* with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done.”

All of those texts and many others tell us that Jesus will use as evidence against unbelievers, and this is a frightening thought, the evidence that will convict unbelievers on the day of judgment will be their own thoughts played back to them, their own words spoken, their own attitudes, their own motives, their own actions. And they will get exactly what those things deserve.

Now, what will God’s verdict be on every life that is judged on his or her works apart from the work of Jesus Christ? Well, we don’t have to wonder, Paul tells us in Romans 3, he fast-forwards in Romans 3 to the judgment. Verse 9, “What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks,” that’s Jews and Gentiles, so this is comprehensive, that’s all the people that exist, Jews and Gentiles, “are all,” without exception, “under sin.” And then he has this string of quotes from the Old Testament to prove that what he’s saying is in the Old Testament Scriptures,

“THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;  
THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS,  
THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;  
THEY HAVE ALL TURNED ASIDE, AND TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS;  
THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD,  
THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.”

You want to wonder what God’s verdict on your thoughts and your motives and your attitudes and your words and your actions will be if you stand at the judgment where unbelievers will be, without Jesus Christ? I can tell you exactly what it will be. You just read it. Guilty, based on the evidence.

You see, our only hope is what Christ offers in the gospel. Look at chapter 3 verse 24. This is where Paul is driving with all the bad news. Here's the good news. Our only hope, in verse 24, is to be "justified" that is, to be declared right with God, "as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." That is our only hope. Because if the evidence is what we're judged on we will be found guilty. So the principal stated then, is that God will render to each person according to his deeds.

That brings us to verses 7 through 10 and the principle explained, Romans 2:7-10. Now this paragraph introduces us to a very difficult question of interpretation. But before we deal with the difficulty let's notice what's obvious. There are two groups in these verses. Let's call them group one and group two. Look first at group one. They are described in verses 7 and 10. Verse 7 says, "to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life." Verse 10, "but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." Group two is described in the middle verses, verses 8 and 9. Notice what Paul says about group two,

but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek.

Now, you'll notice there's an interesting structure here, it's what linguists call a chiasm. It's where the ideas are structured in what's called an A B B A pattern. You notice that verses 7 and 10, group one, verses 8 and 9, group two.

Now, the flow of Paul's thought with both of these groups is the same. I'm going to fill this out next week, but let me just give it to you in nutshell form. Notice they both have ambitions. Notice the ambition of group one in verse 7. They "seek for glory, honor, and immortality." In verse 8, group two's ambition is their own "selfish ambition." They both also have directions, basic directions of life. Notice the direction of group one in verse 7. They are known for "perseverance in doing good." The direction of group two is revealed in verse 8. They "do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness." That's the direction of their lives. Their behavior in verse 2, verse 10 rather, we're told that group one practices what is "good." Group two practices what is "evil," according to verse 9. Now, notice there are also two destinies. Group one, according to verses 7 and 10, receives "eternal life," and then in verse 10, "glory, honor, and peace," and group two, according to verses 8 and 9, receive "wrath and indignation and tribulation and distress." Those are the two groups.

Now, who are these people? Who are these groups? Well, everyone without exception agrees on the content of group two. You saw it as we went through there. Group two is clearly talking about unbelievers, so there's no debate there. The crucial question is, who is in group one? To whom does God here promise a reward for their good works? This is not a simple question and it's not a simple answer. There are three common answers to the question, who is group one?

I'm going to take you through all three of them because I think it's very important for you to understand.

The first answer that we're going to see is not, cannot be the correct one because it contradicts the rest of Romans and the rest of the Scripture, but I'm going to give it to you because I want you to know it's out there. Answers two and three are both orthodox and are possibly what Paul means here. So let's look at the answers.

The first answer that's given to who is in group one is that Paul is here genuinely offering salvation by works to all unbelievers. In other words, this view argues that Paul is offering a legitimate path to salvation by human effort. To paraphrase verse 7, as this mistaken view would put it, if you persevere in doing good and if you seek for glory and honor and immortality God will reward your search for Him with eternal life. Now obviously, that is not the orthodox interpretation of this passage and it absolutely cannot be Paul's meaning. Why? Because it contradicts not only what is said in the rest of Scripture, what he says in the rest of his letters, but even what he says here in this very letter to the Romans.

Let me show you. Look at Romans 3:20, "by the works of the Law," that is, by effort to keep God's Law, "no flesh will be justified," or declared right, "in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin." Nobody will ever be made right with God by their own efforts at keeping God's Law. Verse 28, "For we maintain," this is Paul's teaching, "that a man is declared right before God by faith apart from the works of the Law," apart from his efforts to keep God's Law. Chapter 4 verse 6, "God credits righteousness apart from works," apart from human effort, but the devastating passage is over in chapter 8, Romans 8. Paul is talking about those who are believers versus those who are not and he talks about their mindset. Verse 6,

For the mind set on the flesh [*this is unbelievers*] is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, [*that's believers*] because the mind set on the flesh [*the mind that's occupied with all the things of fallenness*] is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, [*and here's the clincher*] it is not even able to do so.

Even if an unbeliever decided they wanted to keep God's Law they are not able to do so. "For those who are in the flesh," verse 8, "cannot," are not able, "to please God." So clearly, view one is not what Paul is teaching; it contradicts what he says in the rest of the letter as well as it contradicts the rest of Scripture.

View number two. Option two, the second answer to who is it in group one, is an orthodox evangelical answer. Okay, this is possible. Paul is referring to God's reward of the obedience of those who have already been saved by grace through faith. In other words, their obedience doesn't earn them eternal life, their salvation is by grace through faith alone, but their obedience is the evidence of their eternal life. And at the judgment God will reward them for their good



works. They were created for good works. Remember, Ephesians 2:10 says we were saved unto good works, not by good works, but saved unto good works. The good works come after salvation by grace alone through faith alone. And God rewards believers for their good works.

This is, by the way, in the rest of Scripture; it's clear this is absolutely true. The passages that would be quoted would be 2 Corinthians 5:10 where Paul writes to believers, "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or," the Greek word is literally worthless, "whether it's good or worthless." And where it's good there's reward, where it's worthless there's no reward. Clearly, believers will be judged at the judgment seat of Christ based on our deeds. Same thing as unbelievers, not for our justification, not to get into the kingdom, but rather for reward. Revelation 2:23, Jesus is talking to the church in Thyatira and He says, "I am He who searches the minds and hearts and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds."

Now, this view says that those in group one are true believers who have already been saved by grace alone through faith alone. But at the judgment their works do two things. One, their works serve as evidence that they have been saved by grace alone and their works become the grounds on which they receive rewards.

Now, there is no question folks that that is what the Bible teaches is true. We see it in 2 Corinthians 5:10, we see it other places. So this view, what it teaches, is definitely true. But the question is, is this what Paul is teaching in Romans 2? That's the question. I read 14 evangelical commentaries on Romans 2 this last week and this was the majority view, 12 of the 14 said this is what Paul was teaching. Giants of the faith like Augustine and Calvin and commentators I respect, modern commentators like William Hendrickson, John Stott, Leon Morris, Lloyd Jones, and John MacArthur.

So understand then, that this is the most common interpretation of this passage. And it may very well be what Paul intended to say. I understand the arguments in favor of this view. It's clear that what this view teaches is definitely found elsewhere in Scripture. I respect the men who hold this view but, as you can guess, I also must respectfully disagree. Let me give you a couple of reasons that I don't think this is the correct view.

First of all, it doesn't fit the flow of Paul's argument here in Romans 2. These verses are part of a larger section that runs from chapter 2 verse 1 to chapter 3 verse 8 and the point of this entire section is to indict the Jews. It's to show the impossibility of gaining eternal life by their works apart from the gospel.

Secondly, it disagrees with Paul's direct statements in the context. In the very next section of this letter Paul argues that no one does these things. Look again at verses 7 and 10. He's talking about people who persevere in doing good, who seek for God's glory, for honor from God, for

immortality, who consistently practice good, and yet those are the very things that Paul, in Romans 3, says every human being lacks. No one does good, no one is righteous, no one seeks for God, as I just showed you from Romans 3.

So, view two does not fit the context. We ruled out option one because it's just wrong. It's heresy. It contradicts the clear teaching of Scripture. We ruled out, I believe, option two because it's taught elsewhere in Scripture. It's true, but it doesn't fit the context of what Paul is saying here. That leaves us with a third option and the option that seems to me to best fit Paul's argument, and that is, Paul is laying out here, number three, Paul is laying out the impossible condition for salvation by works apart from Christ. In other words, he's establishing the Law.

The promise of eternal life stands for anyone who truly does good, who truly pursues God. Verses 7 and 10 lay out the condition for salvation based on works. But, and here's the key, it lays out a standard that is completely impossible. Paul is going to show in the argument that follows that there has never been one person who has met this standard, impossible to gain eternal life by works.

By the way, the view that I'm teaching you is not the majority view as I noted, but at the same time I'm not standing on an island all by myself here. I'm just not standing with as many people as I normally do. Theologians like Philipp Melancthon, Charles Hodge believe this is what Paul was teaching in this text. One of the most thorough modern commentators, evangelical modern commentators on Romans, Douglas Moo holds this view as well. Ironically, even those who hold to view two, in their commentaries three or four of them said, oh, I don't believe view three but it still fits the context best. So there you go.

But you know, the real question isn't what I believe or what some other commentator believes, the question is, is this what the Scripture says? Does the New Testament support this idea? And does the context support this idea? Scripture is clear that although the moral Law of God, that's the moral Law as outlined in the Ten Commandments, it's summarized by Jesus as loving God with your whole heart, loving your neighbor as yourself, it promised life to anyone who could keep it. But it's impossible. It was impossible and it was never God's purpose that the Law would justify anyone.

Turn to Romans 10. Let's start at chapter 9 verse 31, "Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness," this is Romans 9:31, "Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness," that is, righteousness by keeping law, that's his idea, "did not arrive at that law." Why? "Because they didn't pursue it by faith." They misunderstood. "They thought it was by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone." Go to chapter 10 verse 3, "For not knowing about God's righteousness," His gift of righteousness described in the gospel, "and seeking to establish their own," by keeping the Law by their own efforts, "they did not subject themselves to the true righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."

And then in verses 5 and 6 he talks about these two kinds of righteousness. In verse 5, the righteousness that's out of law, by keeping God's Law. You've got to keep it perfectly, he says, in verse 5. But I'm talking about, in the gospel, verse 6, the righteousness that's out of faith, the righteousness that comes by virtue of faith.

What was the purpose of the Law then if it wasn't to produce righteousness and enable you to gain eternal life? Turn over to Galatians 3. Galatians 3, here's the purpose of the Law, the Law of God. Notice verse 21, "Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law." In other words, if you could be righteous before God by keeping the Law, then the Law God gave in the Old Testament would've done it. But that wasn't its purpose, verse 22, "the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe." Verse 24, "Therefore the law has become our teacher, our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be declared right with God, or justified by faith."

You see, what Paul's doing in Romans 2, this is exactly it. He's using the Law and its perfect, impossible standard of trying to gain eternal life by your own efforts, ultimately to drive people to Christ and to the gospel. Remember, Romans is the pattern that Paul used, his pattern of using the gospel and sharing the gospel when he went into Jewish synagogues during his missionary journeys.

And it's the same pattern, by the way, that our Lord used with Jewish, self-righteous people. You remember the rich young ruler? The rich young ruler comes and says what in Matthew 19? "Lord, how may I gain eternal life?" What work may I do that I may gain eternal life? To which Jesus responds, "Keep the Law." Was Jesus teaching salvation by works? No, He was holding up the mirror of God's perfect standard and saying, okay, you want to be righteous by keeping the Law? Here it is. And good luck with that. It was a way to show him his desperate need.

With someone who thinks he can be good enough, who can meet God's standard, who can earn eternal life, hold up the standard of perfect obedience to the Law. Let me say to you here today, you want to earn your way into heaven, by your obedience, by your efforts? Okay, here you go, just keep this book perfectly. And good luck with that. No. God's standard just highlights our sin, our guilt, our hopelessness, our desperation, and God intended it to do that. He intended His perfect standard to act like a teacher to drive us to Jesus Christ and to the gospel. He is our only hope. That's Paul's point in Romans 2. That is the proper grid, I believe, to interpret Romans 2:7-10. And Lord willing, next week we'll work our way through the text together. Let's pray.

Father, thank You for Your Word. Thank You for this passage. Thank You for the reminder of Your perfect justice that You will render to every man according to his deeds. It will be perfectly based on the evidence.

Father, those of us who are in Christ, we give You praise and thanks for Your grace to us in Jesus. Thank You that He got what we deserved and we get what He deserves.

Father, I pray as well for those here this morning who are still waiting to decide whether or not to follow Christ. Father, I pray that You would help them to see how impossible their true situation is. Help them to see how it will go for them at the judgment if they die outside of Christ. And Father, may today be the day You bring them to a true knowledge of Yourself. We pray in Jesus's name, amen.