

# God's Standards

<b>Key Text:</b>	Romans 1-3:20
<b>Key Verse(s):</b>	“What then? Are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; as it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one.” (Romans 3:9-10)

## Background to the Study

Romans 1:18 begins Paul's explanation of mankind's unrighteousness and guilt, a theme that continues through chapter 3. In this passage, Paul outlines God's condemnation of the ungodly, explaining that they are without excuse and describing the inevitable decline caused by sin. He begins chapter 2 by condemning moralists who judge others. Paul emphasizes that God's wrath against the ungodly results from their suppression of the knowledge of God revealed in nature (verses 18-20). The verb "hold" in the phrase "hold the truth in unrighteousness" means "suppress," "restrain," or "stifle." These individuals also ignored God's revelation to their consciences and failed to be grateful for His blessings (verses 21-23). Their rejection of God led them into deeper darkness, elevating their own reasoning and ultimately creating false gods.

In verses 24-32, Paul describes God's response to this rejection, stating that He "gave them up" to the consequences of their sin, including moral degradation and sexual perversions. Paul emphasizes that such behaviours, including homosexuality, are the result of mankind's rebellion against God. Although homosexuality is often seen today as a lifestyle choice, this passage makes it clear that it is a sin resulting from disobedience to God. In verse 28, Paul repeats that God "gave them over" to a "reprobate mind" due to their revolt. He then lists various sinful behaviours in verses 29-32, concluding that even though people knew these actions deserved punishment, they still approved of them.

In chapter 2, Paul condemns the moralist who judges others, pointing out that by doing so, they acknowledge the existence of a standard of righteousness and are therefore also guilty. God will judge everyone "according to truth" (verse 2) and repay each person according to their deeds (verse 6).

The word "law" appears frequently in this passage, referring not only to the Mosaic Law but also to God's broader revelation of His will for humanity's conduct. Paul asserts that the righteous will be rewarded with glory, honour, and peace, in contrast to the punishment that will befall the ungodly. God's moral law applies to all (verses 11-16), and Paul points out the guilt of the Jews who, despite receiving the Mosaic Law, still broke it (verses 17-29).

In chapter 3, verses 1-8, Paul anticipates objections and offers rebuttals. In verses 9-20, he reiterates the fundamental truth of the Gospel: all humanity is sinful, and while the Law reveals sin, no one can be justified by works. Paul highlights that God does not show partiality between Jews and Gentiles (Romans 2:11). Condemnation is based on revelation, not race, and both Jews and Gentiles will be judged equally.

Paul also critiques the Jews in Romans 2:17-29, showing that true religion is not about outward rituals but moral obedience to God's commandments. In Romans 3:1-8, he acknowledges the advantages of being Jewish, particularly the privilege of receiving God's Scriptures. Despite these advantages, Paul clarifies that all people, regardless of nationality, are "under sin," meaning they are controlled by their sinful nature. Verses 9-20 serve as a legal accusation, with verse 20 revealing two crucial points about the Law: it cannot justify humanity through self-effort and it exposes the true nature of sin.

## Testimony from Our Day

In the first chapter of Paul's epistle to the Romans, the Apostle presents a foundational truth of the Gospel: all have sinned and are deserving of the wrath of God. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, an 18th-century philosopher, found that truth unpalatable.

Rousseau was a notoriously ungodly and blasphemous man who lived in open licentiousness (behaviour that is sexual, in a way that is uncontrolled\*) for decades. He ultimately wrote a twelve-volume autobiography, *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, attempting to justify his misdeeds rather than expressing genuine humility or remorse. He believed himself to be fundamentally good despite his sinful behaviour, a sentiment echoed by many throughout history who have excused sin and rebelled against God's judgments. Romans 1:18 emphasizes that God's wrath will be poured out on those who oppose the truth, a concept that many today find harsh and intolerant. Nevertheless, God's wrath aligns perfectly with His justice and purity. Paul makes it clear that man is without excuse for rejecting God because His existence is evident in creation. God's wrath is a consequence of humanity's deliberate rejection and rebellion. Our eternal destiny depends on whether we acknowledge or reject God.

Paul also addresses the perceived privilege among the Jews, God's chosen people, who felt superior due to their fuller knowledge of God. Despite this privilege, Paul asserts in Romans 3:9-10 that Jews, like Gentiles, are guilty before God for failing to follow His commandments. This message remains relevant today, emphasizing that religious actions alone do not make one righteous. True justification comes through humility and genuine repentance, as provided by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Let's not be confused by the loud voices around us which question God's authority and rebel against His judgments. Our eternal destiny hinges upon whether we acknowledge God or reject Him!

\***Source:** Cambridge Dictionary

# A Closer Look

Question 1	Paul put in place the first foundational element of his message to the Romans by describing God's wrath toward the ungodly, and asserting that all humanity is unrighteous and thus is condemned before God. Why did the Apostle say that people are without excuse for their ungodliness? (Romans 1:18-22)
Question 2	In Romans 2:4, Paul referenced those who despised the riches of God's goodness and forbearance and longsuffering. That same description could apply in many cultures today. Even in places where godly values and Biblical principles were once respected by most people, that is becoming less and less the case. What are some ways that, like Paul, we can show fidelity to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and our unashamed commitment to it in an increasingly hostile environment?
Question 3	In the world today, we are surrounded by ungodly worldviews and lifestyles that are in total contradiction to the teachings of God's Word. What are some steps we can take to resist the pressure to conform to ungodly perspectives?
Question 4	In Romans 2:11, Paul stated, "There is no respect of persons with God." What did he mean by this statement, and why did the Jewish teachers of the Law assume God would be partial to them?
Question 5	What did Paul say bore witness to the Gentiles regarding the "work of the law written in their hearts"? Romans 2:15 Why do you think Paul stressed so strongly that every person is sinful and condemned before God?
Question 6	Perhaps those who grew up in Christian homes could be compared to the Jews of Paul's day in that they are religiously privileged. What are some ways to check and be sure you are living up to what you know?

## Take Home

Paul was straightforward in his exposure of sin and his assertion of universal guilt. We too must take care never to minimize or excuse what God deems as unrighteousness.

No matter how an individual or group of people sees themselves, the human race without exception has a predisposition to evil and rebellion against God.