

KINGDOM.

LESSON 6

1	PRAYER
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Group leader. *Pray* for God's guidance through his Spirit, for awareness of his presence and for listening to his voice. Commit your group and this lesson about preaching God's kingdom to the Lord.

2	SHARING (20 minutes) <i>[QUIET TIMES]</i> DEUTERONOMY 8 -11
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Take turns and *share* (or *read* from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet time with God out of the assigned Bible passages (Deuteronomy chapters 8, 9, 10 and 11). Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares. Take notes.

3	MEMORISATION (5 minutes) <i>[THE KINGDOM OF GOD]</i> REVIEW SERIES I
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Review the series I. "The kingdom of God".

- (1) Enter into the kingdom. John 3:3,5. I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born again. I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.
- (2) Welcome children into the kingdom. Luke 18:16-17. Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a child, will never enter it.
- (3) Preach the gospel of the kingdom. Matthew 24:14. This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.
- (4) Never look back from serving in the kingdom. Luke 9:62. No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.
- (5) The triumph of the kingdom. Daniel 2:44. In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure for ever.

4	BIBLE STUDY (85 minutes) <i>[THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS]</i> ROMANS 2:1-16
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Introduce. Make use of the five steps method of Bible study to study Romans 2:1-16 together.

In Romans chapter 1, Paul showed that the Gentiles have to *experience God's wrath* and that they needed God's righteousness (salvation). The Jews in Rome agreed completely: the godless and wicked Gentiles deserved God's wrath and could never, by their own works, secure the favour of God.

But the Jews still believed that God would judge the Jews in a different way than the Gentiles, because they thought that the Jews were God's chosen people and possessed unique privileges. They believed that if the Jews kept the Law, they would be exempted from God's wrath. Therefore, in Romans 2:1-16, Paul shows that also the Jews are storing up God's wrath for themselves and that Jews like Gentiles needed God's righteousness (salvation).

STEP 1. READ.	GOD'S WORD
Read. LET US READ Romans 2:1-16 together. Let us take turns to read one verse each until we have completed the reading.	

STEP 2. DISCOVER.	OBSERVATIONS
Consider. WHICH TRUTH IN THIS PASSAGE IS IMPORTANT FOR YOU? Or WHICH TRUTH IN THIS PASSAGE TOUCHES YOUR MIND OR HEART? Record. Discover one or two truths that you understand. Think about them and write your thoughts in your notebook. Share. (After the group members have had about two minutes to think and write, take turns to share). Let us take turns to share with one another what each of us has discovered. (Remember: In every small group, the group members will share different things)	

2:1-4

Discovery 1. The reason why also the Jews are condemned (doomed).

(1) The Jews were hypocrites (Romans 2:1).

The Gentiles were openly degenerate. They did what was evil (Romans 1:18) and approved of people doing evil (Romans 1:32).

The Jews pretended that they were righteous and good. They condemned the Gentiles for the wicked things they did, while they themselves were doing the very same wicked things (Romans 2:21-22)! The inclination to judge the Gentiles for their religious and moral perversity was peculiarly a national characteristic of the Jews. Paul identifies the Jews with the expression: “You, O man, whosoever passes judgement on others”. The fact that the Jews judged others proved that the Jews knew God’s righteous decree that people who do evil things deserve death (Romans 1:32). Therefore, the wickedness of the Gentiles is inexcusable (Romans 1:20), but also the wickedness of the Jews is inexcusable (Romans 2:1). The blindness and hypocrisy of the Jews was that they judged the Gentiles for the very wicked things they themselves practised! They failed to realise that by pronouncing condemnation on the Gentiles, they actually pronounced condemnation on themselves.

(2) The Jews were presumptuous (Romans 2:2-3).

The Jews assumed that God’s judgement regarding the Jews would be guided by some other rule than *the truth*. They expected that God would judge the Jews, not according to their real conduct, but according to their (chosen) national and religious relationship with God. They believed that on the basis of the following facts that they (and no-one else) were God’s special people and exempt from punishment:

- They confessed faith in only one God (Deuteronomy 6:1)
- They prayed three times every day (Daniel 6:10)
- They fasted during four months every year (Zechariah 8:19) and two times every week (Luke 18:12)
- They gave a tenth (Malachi 3:10; Luke 18:12), even three tenths of their income (Leviticus 27:30; Deuteronomy 14:22-29) to their religion
- They went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem three times every year (Deuteronomy 16:16)
- They were the physical descendants of Abraham (Matthew 3:7-12; 8:10-12; John 8:30-44)
- They were physically circumcised (Acts 15:1,7-11) and assumed that they were keeping the Law (the Torah, the Sharia)

However, God’s judgement will not be based on their claim to be “Jews” but on their real life and works. God’s judgement or sentence of condemnation on those who are guilty (Romans 5:16; 13:2) is based on “the truth”, that is, “the real facts” of the case. That is why God’s judgement is completely impartial. “God does not show favouritism” (Romans 2:11). Jews do not have any privileged position above Gentiles. Jews must not think that they will escape God’s sentence of condemnation.

(3) The Jews showed contempt (Romans 2:4).

Throughout the history of the Jews, God has shown his kindness, tolerance and patience to the Jews. God expressed his kindness by regarding such an insignificant small nation as his covenant people (Deuteronomy 7:7-9). God expressed his tolerance by time and again restraining himself from punishing them for their sins. And God expressed his patience by continually bearing their provocations against him.

However, throughout their history and especially during the time of the apostle Paul, the Jews despised God’s dealings with them (Acts 13:42-52; 17:13; 28:23-28). They were so convinced of their self-righteousness that they rejected God’s grace revealed in Jesus Christ. In their blind and hardened presumption they *completely misinterpreted* God’s kindness, tolerance and patience with them as a guarantee that God indulged their personal sins and that God would not sentence them to damnation! The Jews were convinced that the Gentiles needed to repent. But the Jews were equally convinced that they themselves did not need to repent. The Jews did not understand that the real purpose of God’s kindness, tolerance and patience with them was to lead them to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). So the Jews persisted in their refusal to be led to repentance (Romans 10:21). Paul is therefore not speaking about God’s *special grace* that always leads people to repentance, (Romans 8:29-30), but about God’s *common grace* that is designed to lead people to repentance (Acts 14:17; 17:24-27).

2:5-16

Discovery 2. The proclamation of God’s judgement on the final judgement day.

(1) The final judgement day is certainly coming (Romans 2:5).

By refusing to repent, the Jews are all the time piling up God’s wrath (cf. God’s wrath against the Gentiles) (Romans 1:18). “God’s wrath” is the just reaction and fair expression of God’s justice and truth against the sins of the Jews. During the time of Paul, God was still patient with the Jews (cf. God’s patience with Gentiles) (2 Corinthians 6:1-2; 2 Peter 3:9), because he does not immediately execute his wrath (indignation) against them, but postpones it till the final judgement day. But on the final judgement day, God will execute his stored up wrath against the unrepentant Jews (and unrepentant Gentiles).

(2) God's five criteria of judgement on the final judgement day (Romans 2:6-12).

First. God's final judgement will be *universal*. God will judge all the Gentiles and all the Jews. No nation will be exempt! Believers in Christ will not be condemned to eternal death (the hell) (John 5:24), but they will be judged for how they lived as Christians (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Second. God's final judgement will be *just*. God will judge each individual according to what he or she has done. On the final judgement day, all people that have ever lived will stand before the throne of Jesus Christ to be judged. The book of life will be opened and if anyone's name was not found written in the Lamb's book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:12b,15; 21:27). The book of life contains all the names of all true believers in Jesus Christ (John 5:24; 6:37; 10:28-30; 17:12). Also other books will be opened and people will be judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books (Revelation 20:12a,c; Matthew 16:27). People will not be judged for the sins of other people (Ezekiel 18:20). But people will be judged according to the *quality* of their own works (1 Corinthians 3:12-15).

Third. God's final judgement will be *fair*. God will either reward or punish people. On the final judgement day, God will reward the righteous (the believer in Christ) with eternal life. But he will punish the wicked (those who do not believe in Jesus Christ) with eternal punishment (Matthew 25:31-46). It is not correct to say that this Bible passage deals exclusively with *the law* and not with *the gospel*, because Paul's teaching concerning the final judgement day is a part of the gospel (Romans 2:16)! It is also not correct to state that the Mosaic Law will be God's criterion for judgement on the final judgement day for both unbelievers and believers. Not the Law, but man's works in the light of God's revelation (including God's general revelation) will be the criterion for the last judgement.

Fourth. God's final judgement will show *no favouritism*. God will judge the Jews with exactly the same criteria as the Gentiles. The words, "first for the Jews, then for the Gentile" (Romans 2:10) may not be interpreted to mean that God will deal more generously with the Jews than with the Gentiles. God is the God of both the Jews and the Gentiles (Romans 3:29). God shows no favouritism (Romans 2:11). And God will certainly judge the Jews with the same criteria that he will use for the Gentiles. Since in the order of history the Jews had received the gospel before the Gentiles, this order will also be followed on the final judgement day. The Jews will be judged first. If they are believers in Christ, they will be the first to be publicly justified and rewarded (Romans 1:16; 2:10). But if they are unbelievers, they will be the first to be publicly condemned to eternal punishment (Romans 2:9).

Fifth. God's judgement will be *absolutely reasonable*. God will judge people according to how much they know about God and God's will. There are two groups of people in the world: "The people who are apart from the law" and "the people who are under the law (literally "in" the law) (Romans 3:19). But because "the requirements of God's moral law" are written on the hearts of even the Gentiles (Romans 2:14-15), these two groups must refer to the people who live *outside God's special revelation* and the people who live *within God's special revelation*.

These five criteria for God's final judgement prove that God does not favour the Jews more than any other nation on earth! The Jews possess no immunity! The Jews have some privileges (Romans 9:4-5), but they are not exempt from the final judgement!

STEP 3. QUESTION.

EXPLANATIONS

Consider. WHICH QUESTION ABOUT ANYTHING IN THIS PASSAGE WOULD YOU LIKE TO ASK TO THIS GROUP?

Let us try to understand all the truths in Romans 2:1-16 and ask questions about the things we still do not understand.

Record. Formulate your question as clearly as possible. Then write your question in your notebook.

Share. (After the group members have had about two minutes to think and write, let each person first share his question.)

Discuss. (Then, choose a few of these questions and try to answer them by discussing them together in your group.)

(The following are examples of questions the students might ask and some notes about the discussion of the questions.)

2:6

Question 1. What is God's criterion for the judgement of all people, including all religious people?

Notes. It is important for people from all religions in the world to understand that no one will be saved according to their religious works, but that all people will be judged according to their works (deeds)!

In their natural state all people are condemned (John 3:18)! Also the adherents of the other religions are condemned! Because they are not righteous in God's eyes, they are already condemned to eternal death!

2:7-11

Question 2. What is God's criterion for the judgement of people who do good or evil?

Notes.

(1) No one will be saved or justified by his (good) works.

How do you reconcile Romans 2:6-8 with Romans 3:22,24? Romans 3:20,22-24 says: "No one (no flesh, no person) will be declared righteous in God's sight by works (the works of the law)." Righteousness comes by:

- God's grace
- Christ's completed work of redemption
- faith of the person in Jesus Christ.

But some people believe that Romans 2:6-8 is saying the opposite: "God will give to each person according to what he has done: eternal life to those who do good and God's wrath and anger to those who do evil."

In this Bible passage Paul says two things:

First. The law is God's righteous requirement for salvation (justification). God's holiness and righteousness demands that all people in the world must be completely holy and righteous as God is and that all their sins must be fully punished! In Romans 2:6-8 Paul does NOT teach the method of justification, but the criterion of righteousness that will be applied to all people who rely on the law for their justification. If people rely on their works (their keeping the law) as the means of their justification (salvation), they must meet all and not just some of the requirements of the law (Romans 2:13; Leviticus 18:5; Ezekiel 20:11). They must keep the law completely, perfectly (for 100%) or else be "cursed" by God (Galatians 3:10-11)! Even if they fail in just one requirement of the law, they are guilty of breaking the whole law (James 2:10)!

In Romans 3:10-24 Paul teaches that there is not a single person that keeps the law in such a way that he could be justified (saved). The gospel is the good news that God made an eternal plan to justify (save) people without the works of the law. While *the law* condemns all people of falling short of God's required perfection, *the gospel* proclaims how Jesus Christ justifies (saves) condemned people. While *the law* makes it clear that all people need a saviour, *the gospel* proclaims the Saviour.

Second. The law is God's righteous measure or standard for the final judgement (condemnation). In the issue of salvation the law can only condemn every person as guilty and lost. But in the issue of the final judgement the law functions as the measure or standard by which unbelievers and wicked people will be condemned (doomed) and also as the measure and standard for the punishment of unbelievers and the reward of believers. The salvation or condemnation of a person is already determined during his life on earth, but his lifestyle and works will only be judged at the end of human history. Then all people will be judged in accordance with their good and evil works (Ecclesiastes 12:14; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Ephesians 6:8).

God will openly declare the righteous (believers) to be saved for ever and reward them in accordance with their works as Christians. But God will openly declare the unrighteous (unbelievers) to be doomed for ever because of their unholy, unrighteous and imperfect works. They will be condemned (doomed) for:

- their unbelief - because they did not believe in Jesus Christ (John 3:18)
- their evil – they rejected the truth and followed evil (Romans 2:8)
- their lack of righteousness – they did not do right to Christ or his brothers (Matthew 25:40-41,45)

They will be punished fairly in accordance with what their evil works deserve (Luke 12:47-48).

Thus, Romans 2:8 teaches that people will be judged and condemned by their evil works. But Romans 2:7 does NOT teach that there will be some people who will be saved or justified by their good works.

Why does Paul then say that God will give eternal life (and peace) to those "who persistently do good and who seek glory, honour and immortality"? Humanists and religious people may begin to believe that their good works would be able to save them!

The first question here is: "What is "good" in God's eyes?" "What is good" in verse 7 must be the opposite of "what is evil" in verse 8. "What is good" must therefore be defined by:

- accepting the truth (Note: the truth is Jesus Christ (John 14:6), the Bible (John 17:17), the teachings of Jesus Christ (John 8:31-32) and the realities of his accomplished work of salvation (John 1:17)
- following what is good in God's eyes: the God of the Bible and his righteousness (Mark 10:18)
- and seeking glory (God's nature), honour (God's approval), immortality (God's life) and peace (God's wholeness).

"What is evil" must be defined by "rejecting the truth", "following what is evil in God's eyes" and "not striving after God's nature, God's approval, God's life or God's wholeness!"

And the second question here is: "Is it possible to do good (in the eyes of the God of the Bible) apart from Jesus Christ?" The answer is: "No!". "Apart from me (Jesus Christ), you can do nothing (that has eternal value) (John 15:5)!"

(2) The people who really do "good"
persist in doing good (Romans 2:7).

Matthew 24:13 says, "He who stands firm to the end will be saved". This refers to the perseverance and endurance of Christians (Colossians 1:22-23; Hebrews 3:14). Romans 2:7 combines two thoughts: a Christian perseveres in doing good and a Christian aspires towards hope or a very certain expectation, that is, he aspires to the reality at the end (which is eternal salvation that consists of glory, honour, immortality and peace). By relating "doing what is good" to "salvation", Paul emphasises that they may never be separated. Good works without salvation through Jesus Christ are dead works. And salvation through Jesus Christ without good works is presumption.

(3) The people who really do "good"
are focussed on the future reality of Christians (Romans 2:7).

What these people seek (desire to attain, strive after) is "the eternal life". The terms "glory, honour, immortality and peace" describe the nature, value, durability and blessings of eternal life (Romans 2:7,10).

Glory. The word "glory" (Greek: doxa) refers to participating in God's nature (2 Peter 1:4). "Glory" refers to the future expectation of Christians, namely the final *transformation* of everything at the second coming of Christ (Romans 5:2; 8:17). When believers in Jesus Christ die and see Jesus face to face (Philippians 1:23) their spirits will be transformed so that their whole personalities will be conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ and they too will reflect the glory of God (Romans 8:17,18,21,29,30; 9:23; 1 Corinthians 2:7; 2 Corinthians 4:17; Colossians 3:4; 1 John 3:1-3). And when Jesus Christ returns the mortal bodies of believers in Jesus Christ will be resurrected and transformed to become like the glorious body of Jesus Christ himself (1 Corinthians 15:43; Philippians 3:21). Then also the whole old earth will be shaken and cleansed with fire and transformed into a new earth (Romans 8:21).

Honour. The word "honour" (Greek: timé) refers to receiving God's approval of believers in Jesus Christ in contrast to his disapproval and reproach of the ungodly and wicked people especially at the second coming (Matthew 25:21; Hebrews 2:7; 1 Peter 1:7; 2 Peter 1:17; Revelation 4:9,11; 5:12-13).

Immortality. The word "immortality" (Greek: aftharsia) refers to sharing God's life, the imperishable nature after the resurrection from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:42). It refers to the *hope* of Christians in the resurrection of their bodies at the second coming (Romans 8:23; 1 Corinthians 15:42-54; 2 Corinthians 5:4; 1 Peter 1:4).

Peace. And the word "peace" (Greek: eiréné) refers to sharing God's wholeness, the complete absence of trouble and distress on the new earth (Revelation 21:4). It does not merely refer to peace between nations on earth, but peace in its highest sense, namely, *peace with God* (Isaiah 26:3-4; Romans 5:1), peace with Christians from every nation (Ephesians 2:14-15) and *peace of heart and mind* in the full enjoyment of God unto all eternity (Philippians 4:7; Revelation 21:4).

These aspirations to glory, honour, immortality and peace are the aspirations and expectations of Christians, not of non-Christians! Only Christians can have such desires, aspirations and expectations! Only Christians can have such a hope!

But for those who are self-seeking, reject the truth and follow evil there will be the wrath and anger of God and trouble and distress in the hell (Romans 2:8-9). They will perish (Romans 2:12).

Unbelievers and believers of other religions do not have these aspirations or expectations: they do not believe in rebirth and transformation (John 3:3) or in the resurrection from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:19). They do not seek the approval of the God of the Bible and do not make peace with him. The requirement of God's law is not met in them (Romans 8:4a; cf. John 10:11). And they do not live according to the Holy Spirit, but only according to their sinful natures (Romans 8:4b; cf. 1 Corinthians 12:3).

Thus, the people who persistently seek glory, honour, immortality and peace are Christians, not non-Christians. They do not obtain eternal life by doing any good work, but their good works are an assurance to them that God has given eternal life to them (Luke 3:8; John 15:5,8). Because they possess eternal life, their life is characterised by perseverance in doing good and by aspirations of hope.

(4) The people who really do "good"
base what they do on submission to the God of the Bible (Romans 2:8)

It is "good" to submit oneself to the God of the Bible instead of being self-seeking. It is "good" to believe and accept the truth of the Bible instead of rejecting, suppressing or exchanging this truth by the so-called truths of non-Christians (the other religions) (Romans 1:18,25).

(5) The people who really do "good"
base what they do on the truth that is revealed in the Bible (Romans 2:8).

Although the truth revealed in God's special revelation in the Old Testament is much greater than his truth revealed in his creation (Romans 1:18), the wicked among the Gentiles and the wicked among the Jews have this one thing in common and that is that they both reject the truth! "The truth" is Jesus himself (John 14:6), the teachings of Jesus Christ (John 8:31-32), the realities (in stead of the shadows of) the accomplished salvation work of Jesus Christ (John 1:17) and God's Word (the Bible) (John 17:17).

It is very clear that "the good works of verse 7 are not any kind of works that are deemed "good in the eyes of the common people" (humanists), but works that are "good in God's eyes", because they are completely based on the truth,

that is, on the truth of God's special revelation as it is revealed in Christ and the Bible. The truth is the gospel and whatever the Bible teaches about the Christian faith and practice. The good works must include faith in Jesus Christ (John 6:28-29)!

The Bible teaches very clearly that it is impossible to do what is "good" in God's eyes apart from Jesus Christ! John 14:6 says that no one in the whole world or history will come to God the Father but by Jesus Christ! Acts 4:12 says that there is no other name than Jesus Christ given under heaven by which all people must be saved! And John 15:5 teaches that apart from Jesus Christ a person can do nothing, that is, nothing good and nothing that has any lasting value in God's eyes!

God does not show favouritism in the final judgement. Not the law and not the gospel will be the criterion in the final judgement, but the works of man! God will judge man in accordance with how he lived, in accordance with what he did and in accordance with what he neglected to do, regardless whether he had little or much knowledge of the law or the gospel! God will judge Jews with exactly the same criteria as the Gentiles.

Conclusion. The people who really do "good" can only be believers in Jesus Christ. Only Christians do what is good in the eyes of the God of the Bible. The good they do is that they seek above everything else the Kingdom (kingship) of the God of the Bible and what is right in his eyes (Matthew 6:33). The good they do is NOT the so-called good works in the eyes of people or their personal righteousness, but the fact that they have received Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord and with him the righteousness which he earned (cf. Matthew 10:18; John 6:28-29). "Eternal life" is thus never earned or deserved by believers, but only given to believers in Jesus Christ! Unbelievers or believers of other religions will not be saved by simply doing good works, because their good works are not based on the truth which the Bible teaches. Their good works are based on what they themselves or their religious teachers (humanists, swamis, rabbis, pastors, mullahs etc.) say. These good works in the eyes of people always fall far short of God's demand of perfection!

2:12a,14-15

Question 3. What is God's criterion for judgement of the Gentiles?

- (1) The Gentiles are outside God's special revelation, and have not yet heard the gospel.

Notes. Romans 2:12a says, "All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law".

Romans 2:14 and 15 is an elaboration of God's criterion of judgement for the Gentiles on the final judgement day. It is an answer to the question, "How can the Gentiles be regarded as "sinners" when they have never heard the law?"

The answer is that although the Gentiles do not have the written law (the Old and New Testament revelations), they nevertheless do "the works" (NIV: requirements) of the law that is written on their hearts and their consciences accuse their transgressions of the law. The Gentiles prove that they have knowledge of God's moral laws, because of two things:

- (2) The Gentiles do by nature the things required by God's (moral) laws.

For example, the Gentiles pursue lawful vocations, marry and have children, show filial and natural affection, care for the poor and the sick, and do many other virtuous things which are also required by God's revealed law. They do these things "by nature", which means, that this is their natural instinct or inclination in distinction from some law outside themselves, which forces them to do something. The fact that the Gentiles do by nature the works of the law, prove that "they are a law to themselves", that is, *they are their own law book that reveals God's law to them!* Some of their own actions reveal that the requirements of God's moral law are written in the very constitution of their human nature. It is important to notice that this "law" (of which the requirements are written in the natural constitution of every human being since creation), is not a different law than the law that God revealed to the Jews through Moses.

- (3) The conscience of the Gentiles functions on the basis of their knowledge of these requirements of the laws that are written on their heart.

The "conscience" is a function of the human spirit and makes moral discriminations and judgements. The conscience functions like an inward judge or inward monitor, requiring human beings to do what these moral laws written on their hearts demand. The thoughts of the human conscience sometimes condemn and at other times acquit the moral conduct of humans.

- (4) Gentiles who sin apart from God's law (that is, God's special revelation) will also perish apart from God's law (God's special revelation).

Gentiles, who have never heard *God's special revelation*, cannot plead innocence, because they all have knowledge of *God's general revelation* that is written on their hearts. Their conscience functions as an advocate accusing their transgressions of the law or defending their obedience to the law.

Also all Gentiles have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:10-12,23). Because they sin, they are guilty in God's eyes and will certainly be judged by God and perish.

But because the Gentiles sin without knowing God's special revelation, God will only judge them in accordance with the criteria of his general revelation: their knowledge of God (derived from the creation) and their knowledge of God's moral law (derived from the moral law written on their hearts). And God will judge them according to how they have lived in the light of the knowledge of God's general revelation, which they possess. They will not be judged according to any law that they did not possess.

The godless and wicked cities of Sodom, Gomorrah, Tyre and Sidon did not possess the Old Testament or the New Testament revelations. Therefore the final judgement day will be more bearable for them than for the Jews living in the time of Jesus, because the Jews possessed the Old Testament revelation (the law) and had heard the New Testament gospel (Matthew 10:15; 11:20-24).

The Gentiles will be *judged* apart from God's special revelation (the Old Testament law and the New Testament gospel), but will also *perish* apart from God's special revelation! What God reveals in his special revelation about heaven and hell is therefore not directed to the Gentiles who do not possess God's special revelation. The only thing we can say about the Gentiles is that God will judge them with absolute justice and fairness. "That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked (Luke 12:47-48). Thus, the last judgment (and punishment) of God corresponds completely with the nature of the sin of man!

God demands from Christians that their mercy should surpass their sacrifices. Jesus says, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matthew 9:13). All sinners need God's mercy. Thus we may expect from God the following: "That God's mercy will also surpass his judgement" (James 2:13)! How, has not been revealed to us!

2:12b,13

Question 4. What is God's criterion for the judgement of Jews?

Notes.

(1) The Jews are *inside* God's special revelation, but have rejected his special revelation.

(2) Jews who sin under the law (God's special revelation) will be judged by God's law (God's special revelation).

Romans 2:12b says, "All who sin under (literally: "in") the law will be judged by the law." In the time of Paul, the Jews lived under (literally "in") the law (that is, God's special revelation in the Old Testament). The majority of them also rejected the gospel (God's special revelation in the New Testament). In contrast to the majority of Gentiles at that time, the Jews sinned with full knowledge of God's special revelation. The Jews will be judged in accordance with God's special revelation and this means in accordance with the following three criteria of judgement:

- Their works (life, deeds, behaviour) in the light of *God's general revelation* (in creation, in the heart and in the conscience of natural man) will judge them.
- Their works in the light of *God's special revelation in the Old Testament* (in the Law and in the Prophets) will judge them. They will certainly be condemned for transgressing God's laws in the Old Testament.
- And if they had heard the gospel and rejected it, they will also be judged by their works (life, deeds, and behaviour) in the light of *God's special revelation in the New Testament* (in the gospel, which they rejected). They will certainly be condemned for their unbelief (John 3:18,36; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9; Hebrews 4:2), for their neglect of doing what God requires (Matthew 25:41-46) and for their many sins that have not been forgiven (Matthew 6:14; John 9:41; Hebrews 4:6).

With Jews there will be an exact correspondence between the nature of their sin and their punishment. But because they had much more knowledge of God and his will than the Gentiles did, their final judgement and punishment will be aggravated in accordance with the gravity of their sin (Luke 12:47-48).

(3) The criterion for judgement will not simply be knowledge of the truth, but also obedience of the truth in God's special revelation.

Many Jews thought that simply possession and knowledge of the Holy Book of God (the Old Testament Scripture, the Torah) would justify them. The Holy Book was revered, kissed, handled with respect, discussed, debated and preached in their midst. Every Sabbath, they heard the reading of the Book in their synagogues. Nevertheless, they DID NOT BELIEVE what they heard (Hebrews 4:2) and DID NOT DO what they heard (Hebrews 4:6)! The Jews generally neglected the most important aspect of the Book – they did not believe or obey its contents! They did not live according to its teachings! Jesus condemned the Pharisees, because they did not practise what they preached (Matthew 23:3). The Jews will be judged according to their works (life, deeds, behaviour) and not simply according to their knowledge.

When Paul says, "It is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's eyes, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared justified" (Romans 2:13), then he does not imply that Jews or anybody else could be justified on

account of their keeping the law. He does not imply that people's deeds would only be weighed on a scale on the final judgement day and that people would be declared righteous on the basis of their obedience of the law of God. The Bible very clearly says, "By observing the law no one (Greek: no flesh, no human being) will be justified" (Galatians 2:16b; Romans 3:28)! What Paul means is that the criterion of judgement on the final judgement day will not be what one has heard or knows about the Old Testament, but how one has lived in accordance with the contents of the Old Testament! The law is nor the means or criterion for justification, but it is the criterion for judgement!

(4) God's righteous requirement for salvation (justification)

is nothing less than absolute perfect (100%) obedience to the law!

Romans 2:13 says, "For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous." The Bible does NOT teach that God would justify (save) people on the basis of their obedience to the law, but DOES teach that that God will judge people in accordance with the law they possess. God's law (special revelation) in Leviticus 18:5 says, "The man who obeys them (God's decrees and laws) will live by them". Both the Old Testament (Leviticus 18:5; Ezekiel 20:11) as well as the New Testament (Romans 2:7; 10:5; Galatians 3:12) teach that if there were people who could keep (obey) God's decrees and laws completely and perfectly (100%), then they would be justified (saved) by God. However, after the fall of man into sin justification (salvation) by obedience to the law is NO longer possible!

(5) No human being on earth or in history qualifies,

because no one can keep the law completely and perfectly (100%).

Both the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 27:26) as well as the New Testament (Galatians 3:10; James 2:10) teach that all people who want to be justified or saved by keeping the law, are compelled to keep the law 100% completely and perfectly. James 2:10 says, "Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles *at just one point* is guilty of breaking all of it." And Galatians 3:10 says, "All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not *continue to do everything* written in the Book of the Law'." All (humanistic and religious) people who want to be justified (saved) by keeping the law are (without realising it) under God's curse, precisely because there is not a single person (except Jesus Christ) who has kept or can keep the law 100% completely and perfectly! Romans 3:10 teaches, "There is no one who is righteous, not even one!" No one will receive eternal life or Paradise by keeping the law!¹

Conclusion. Romans 2:13 does not teach that there will be some people who will be saved or justified by doing the works of the law.

2:12b,13

Question 5. What is God's criterion for the judgement of Christians?

Notes.

(1) The Christians are *inside* God's special revelation, and have accepted the gospel.

(2) Christians who sin under God's special revelation will be judged by God's special revelation.

Also the Christians will be judged in accordance with the general and special revelations of God and this means in accordance with the following two criteria at the Last Judgment:

Sincere Christians will be judged on the basis of their faith in Jesus Christ. Christians have already been justified (saved) by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ and the righteousness he earned for them in their place. Christians will never be condemned (doomed) to the eternal fire of hell (John 5:24; Romans 8:1), but will be publicly vindicated by God on the final judgement day (Matthew 25:31-34).

Christians will inherit the new earth together with Christ, because their names have been recorded in the Lamb's book of life (Revelation 10:20; 20:15). Jesus Christ made atonement for all the sins of those who genuinely believe in him (Jesus Christ) and his completed work of salvation. He made atonement for their past sins, their present sins and their future sins. In Hebrews 8:12 God says, "I will forgive their wickedness and will remember (mention) their sins no more."

The works (deeds, life, behaviour) of sincere Christians will be judged in the light of God's special revelation in the Bible. This judgement will not determine their salvation (justification), but their reward (1 Corinthians 3:12-15). Christians will be judged according to how they have lived their justified (saved, Christian) lives. Their works (deeds, life, and behaviour) will be judged in accordance with all the moral laws in the Bible and in accordance with all the teachings of Jesus Christ in the Bible. Their works will be judged in order to test *the quality of their faith* and *the fruit of their salvation*.

¹ This has far-reaching consequences for Jews, Christians and Muslims who try to be justified by keeping the law (the Torah, the Ten Commandments or the Sharia)!

Nominal Christians (people who are only “Christian” because their culture is Christian) will certainly be condemned (doomed) for their unbelief (John 3:18,36; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9), their neglect of doing what God requires (Matthew 25:41-46) and their many sins that have not been forgiven (Matthew 6:14; John 9:41).

- (3) Christians are justified through their faith in Jesus Christ
and on the ground of the righteousness which Jesus Christ had earned for them in their place.

No Christian will be justified on the basis of his obedience to the law or any of his religious works (so-called evangelical obedience)! God’s righteous requirement for salvation is nothing less than absolute (100%) complete and perfect obedience to the law, namely, that a person must be absolutely (100% as God) holy and righteous and that all his sins have been completely (100%) punished by a (100%) perfect sacrifice of atonement! If there were Christians who had kept the law completely and perfectly, they would have been declared righteous by God. But no Christian qualifies, because no Christian can keep the law perfectly (Romans 3:10,23; Galatians 3:10; James 2:10).

However, Christians are justified (saved), not on the basis of their own (always imperfect) works, but *on the basis of* God’s (100%) completed work of salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The ground of their salvation (justification) is NOT WHAT THEY DO, but WHAT JESUS CHRIST HAS ALREADY DONE FOR THEM! And Christians receive this righteousness (salvation) (that consists of the 100% complete and perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ) (1 Corinthians 1:30) through their faith in Jesus Christ. Their faith is not the ground or reason of their salvation, but *the means* by which they receive the (100%) complete and perfect righteousness that God demands and Christ has earned.

- (4) The criterion for judgement will not simply be historic faith,
but faith that bears works as its fruit.

The criterion of judgement for Christians on the final judgement day will not be what Christians have heard or know about the Old Testament and the New Testament, but how they have lived according to the contents of the Bible!

- (5) Christians are justified (saved)
on the ground of the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Christians will never be saved or justified by a faith that is a pure historic faith, that is, a faith in the truths of the Bible without obedience to the contents of the Bible (the specific works that belong to salvation) (James 2:14-26). God’s judgement will not respect merely faith or justification by faith in the abstract. He will respect faith and justification by faith in its relationship to all the elements that comprise the righteous (saved) state. In salvation, God’s grace may not be emphasised to the extent that the practical Christian’s life is set aside. Believers are not simply saved from evil and every kind of unrighteousness, but also saved to every form of righteousness and a holy life. They are not simply saved from a meaningless and empty life, but also saved to a very meaningful and fruitful life in good works.

- (6) Christians are rewarded
on the basis of the righteousness of Christ.

Christians will also be rewarded, not on the ground of their own works (which are always imperfect), but on the ground of the completed work of salvation of Jesus Christ (which is always completely perfect). They will be rewarded, not because of the good works they did, but only because God in Jesus Christ has been gracious to them.

However, they will be rewarded in accordance with their own works. Their good works are for them the proof or clear evidence that they belong to those people whom God has saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-10). Their works will be the criterion for their reward (Matthew 25:20-21; 1 Corinthians 3:14-15) and thus also the criterion of God’s evaluation of Christians.

- (7) The criterion for good works is God’s moral law.

The criterion for works is the Ten Commandments and all the other moral teachings in the Bible. The moral law of God has never been abrogated for Christians. Although Christians are no longer “under the law” (Romans 6:14), they nevertheless are “not free from God’s law, but under Christ’s law” (namely, to love God and their neighbour)(13:8-10; Mark 12:30-31; 1 Corinthians 9:21). The moral law of the Bible is not the ground or the means of justification, but is the guideline how the Christian as a justified person (as a Christian) should live the saved life (cf. Exodus 20:1-2).

Conclusion. When Paul says, “God will give to each person according to what he has done” (Romans 2:6), he includes Christians. The good works of Christians, as *the evidences* of their faith and salvation by grace, are therefore the criterion of God’s assessment of Christians. The good works of Christians have an essential (indispensable) place in the biblical doctrine of salvation (Matthew 5:16; Galatians 6:9-10; Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 2:14).

2:16

Question 6. How will God judge people on the final judgement day?

Notes.

The final judgement day is an essential part of the proclamation of the gospel. On the final judgement day, God will judge all people who have ever lived. He will judge people’s secrets through Jesus Christ, as his gospel declares.

(1) People will be judged according to all their works.

Not just the outward actions of people, but also the hidden secrets of people will be judged (Ecclesiastes 12:14). This is especially directed towards the unbelieving Jews, who specialised in correct outward behaviour. In Romans chapter 2, Paul had repeatedly exposed the fallacy of Jewish presumption. Now he also exposes the foolishness of Jewish externalism. God's judgement will be according to the truth, that is, according to the actual thoughts, motives, attitudes and actions of people. And it will certainly include all secret and shameful actions (2 Corinthians 4:2; Ephesians 5:12).

(2) People will be judged according to the gospel which Paul proclaimed.

This cannot mean that the gospel will be the universal criterion of God's judgement.

The law. The law as a part of God's special revelation in the Old Testament is not the universal criterion of God's judgement (Romans 2:12).

The gospel. Also the gospel as a part of God's special revelation in the New Testament cannot be the universal criterion of God's judgement.

The works. The universal criterion of God's judgment is "the works of people", that is, how people have lived in accordance to the light of revelation (from the law and the gospel) they have received.

What Paul means to say in verse 16, is that the gospel not only proclaims salvation through Jesus Christ, but also God's judgement through Jesus Christ on the final judgement day on all the good and bad works of people (Matthew 25:31-46; John 5:22,27-29). The proclamation of God's righteous judgement of all people and of all their hidden secrets is an outstanding feature of the gospel.

God's grace does not dispense with God's judgement!

The proclamation of the gospel of God's love and grace
must include the proclamation of God's indignation and judgement!

STEP 4. APPLY.

APPLICATIONS

Consider. WHICH TRUTHS IN THIS PASSAGE ARE POSSIBLE APPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIANS?

Share and record. Let us brainstorm with one another and record a list of possible applications from Romans 2:1-16.

Consider. WHICH POSSIBLE APPLICATION DOES GOD WANT YOU TO TURN INTO A PERSONAL APPLICATION?

Record. Write this personal application down in your notebook. Feel free to share your personal application.

(Remember that people in every group will apply different truths or even make different applications of the same truth. The following is a list of possible applications.)

1. Examples of possible applications from Romans 2:1-16.

- 2:1. Beware of passing judgement on others when you do the same wrong things.
- 2:3. When you do wrong, you cannot escape God's judgement.
- 2:4. Be kind, tolerant and patient towards wicked people, in order to give them an opportunity to repent.
- 2:5. When you do not repent, you store up God's wrath against yourself.
- 2:6. Give attention to what you do (how you live), because God will judge you on that basis.
- 2:7. Persist to do good, because you hope in the new future.
- 2:8. Never reject the truth in the Bible!
- 2:11. Never show favouritism!
- 2:12. Christ will judge you in accordance with your knowledge of his revelation in the heart and in the Bible.
- 2:13. Christ will judge you in accordance with how you lived, how you obeyed his revelation.

2. Examples of personal applications from Romans 2:1-16.

I want to remember that God will also judge me (a Christian) according to my works. He will judge me, not to find out whether he should justify me, but to test the quality of my faith and the fruit of my salvation.

I want to persevere in doing good because I have a real future hope!

STEP 5. PRAY.

RESPONSE

LET US TAKE TURNS TO PRAY ABOUT ONE TRUTH THAT GOD HAS TAUGHT US in Romans 2:1-16. (Respond in your prayer to what you have learned during this Bible study. Practise to pray only in one or two sentences. Remember that people in every group will pray about different issues.)

5

PRAYER (8 minutes)

[INTERCESSION]
PRAY FOR OTHERS

Continue to pray in groups of two's or three's. Pray with one another for one another and for the people in the world (Romans 15:30; Colossians 4:12).

(Group leader. Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. Commitment. Be committed to make disciples, build the Church and preach the kingdom.
2. Preach, teach or study Romans 2:1-16 with another person or group of people.
3. Personal time with God. Have a quiet time from half a chapter of Joshua 1, 6 and Judges 2, 7 each day.
Make use of the favourite truth method. Make notes.
4. Memorisation. (1) Romans 1:16. Daily review the last 5 memorised Bible verses.
5. Teaching. Prepare the parable of "the weeds among the wheat" contained in Matthew 13:24-30 and 36-43.
Make use of the six guidelines for interpreting parables.
6. Prayer. Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
7. Update your notebook on preaching God's kingdom. Include your notes on quiet time, your memorisation notes, your Bible study notes and this preparation.