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**A1427 – July 6, 2014 – Romans 2:1-4**  
**The Kindness Of God**

Having completed the exposition of Romans 1:18-32 I want to make clear several things we learn that answer common questions people have. First, what about the arguments for God's existence? These are commonly found in Systematic Theology; the cosmological argument, the teleological argument, the moral argument, etc...Romans 1 shows that there is no need to argue for God's existence; that all men already know God exists and that you are on a fool's errand if you buy the question and start trotting out these arguments. Men who deny God's existence are merely suppressing the truth they know in unrighteousness. Instead, what we need to do is learn from Scripture how to talk to people in order for the discussion to be used by the Holy Spirit to break through the suppression. The technique revealed throughout Scripture is to simply recount God's work of creation and His work of sustaining the creation and remind them that they have been living off of His gracious provision their entire lives without giving thanks. Then press for repentance toward Him. If they repent then you share with them the gospel message and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Second, what about those who have never heard? Or the hot-n-tot in Africa? Romans 1 indicates that there is no one who has never heard. God is always, everywhere making Himself clearly known to men through creation. The presupposition behind the question is that God is not just in sending someone to hell without letting them have the fair chance of hearing the gospel. This is faulty reasoning. They already have knowledge but they are suppressing that knowledge. Isaiah says, "Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been declared to you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?" And again, "Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, the LORD? And there is no other God." All people know God but they don't want to know God. They are willfully ignorant and hiding from Him. So if they won't acknowledge God in creation then on what basis would they believe the gospel? On no basis. The

issue is not what about those who never heard. The issue is why don't people acknowledge what they have heard? And then we realize the fault is not with God but with them. Third, what is fundamentally wrong with societies? Romans 1 says the fundamental problem in societies is not moral. That is where everyone goes. If people would just reform their morals and do what they know is right society would get better. Wrong. That is called the axiological or moral problem and it exists but it is not the fundamental problem. Then people turn to education. And if people would just get more and better education then society would get better. That is called the epistemological or education problem and it exists but it is not the fundamental problem. The fundamental problem is theological in nature. Men are fundamentally at enmity with God. They don't acknowledge Him or give thanks. They don't think it worthy to have Him in their thinking so they suppress Him and the consequences of that suppression are that we have the educational and moral problems in society. So if we are really interested in solving the problems of our society we will focus on addressing the theological problem in men's hearts and not on fixing people's morality and education. Fourth, is it true that God gives more light to those who respond positively to the light in creation? I don't see that in Romans 1. Romans 1 says that men have crystal clear knowledge of God through creation but they don't give thanks or honor to Him and on that basis they are condemned. So the answer to how then does a man get saved must lie somewhere other than man. Paul's not addressing how a man gets saved but it is essential that he hear the gospel message. No one can be saved by looking at the stars. Some people have argued that God wrote the gospel in the stars and the heathen were saved through that. Nonsense. The only way to be saved is to believe the gospel content available by special revelation in the Scriptures. That's why there is an impetus for translating the Bible into foreign languages, that's why there's an impetus for sending out missionaries. If people could be saved apart from the word of God then why do this work? It's vital that we do this work because what did Paul say in 1:16, the gospel is the power of God unto salvation, not the stars, the gospel and the gospel is linguistic information, it's verbal, it has nouns and verbs and a grammatical structure to it which sufficiently captures the person of Christ as the God-man and the work of Christ, the death for our sins and resurrection. The Holy Spirit uses that message to convince a person to believe. So that message is essential for salvation but all that is needed for condemnation is creation.

Now we come to Romans 2:1-16 and there are a number of issues we need to introduce. First, to whom is it addressed? The majority of commentators hold that it is addressed exclusively to Jews. For example, Denney suggests, “The apostle has now to prove that the righteousness of God is as necessary to the Jew as to the pagan; it is the Jew who is really addressed in this chapter from the beginning.”<sup>1</sup> However, a second, minority view is that it is addressed to both Jews and Gentiles. I think this is the better view for two reasons. First, because Gentiles and Jews are addressed directly in this section. If you note in verse 9, “There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek.” This seems to be all-encompassing and not to Jews only. And verse 10, “but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek,” again addressing both sides of the human race. And in verse 14 Gentiles in specific are mentioned, “For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these not having the Law, are a law to themselves.” The second evidence that Paul is addressing both Jew and Gentile in this section is that Paul begins to address Jews exclusively only beginning in verse 17. Here he says, “But if you bear the name “Jew” and rely upon the Law and boast in God...” This clearly starts the section addressing Jews exclusively in verse 17 and not before. So what is said in 2:1-16 applies to both Jews and Gentiles.

The second issue is the structure. How does what is related in 2:1ff relate to that which precedes? Clearly there is a relationship since Paul begins with the word **Therefore**. I would suggest that Paul is giving more logical consequences for suppressing the truth in unrighteousness as originally stated in 1:18-23. He used **Therefore** in verse 24 to state present consequences of suppressing the truth in unrighteousness as the wrath of God in giving men over to their vices. He uses **Therefore** again in 2:1 to state future consequences of suppressing the truth in unrighteousness as the wrath of God unleashed in the Day of Judgment. So 1:24-32 is stating the present wrath of God and 2:1-16 is stating the future wrath of God. But the real key to the entire section is what is said in 1:18-23 about the suppression of truth in unrighteousness. It is because of that that a present form of the

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<sup>1</sup> Wuest, K. S. (1997). *Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader* (Ro 2:1). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

wrath of God is being revealed and it is because of that that a future form of the wrath of God is coming.

The third issue is the basis of condemnation. On what basis are men condemned? One of the common claims, a claim I have made, is that men are condemned only because they have not believed. The reasoning being that Christ died for all sins and therefore there is no condemnation because of any sins. The only basis of condemnation is lack of belief. The Scripture commonly cited is John 3:18, "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." So it is true that a man is condemned because of lack of faith. However, it is also true that man is condemned for other reasons in addition to lack of faith. Jesus said that people would die in their sins in John 8:21, "Then He said again to them, "I go away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin; where I am going, you cannot come." They will die in their sin even though Christ died for their sin. The reason being that while Christ died for all sin the application of that payment is conditioned on the human response of faith. So men are condemned for lack of faith but they are also condemned for a number of other reasons. Romans 1-3 is cataloguing a quite extensive basis of condemnation. Scofield, in his article titled *The Grace of God*, published about 100 years ago in *The Fundamentals* said, "Condemned by creation, the silent testimony of the universe (Rom. 1:18, 20); by willful ignorance, the loss of a knowledge of God once universal (Rom. 1:21); by senseless idolatry (Rom. 1:22, 23); by a manner of life worse than bestial (Rom. 1:24, 27); by godless pride and cruelty (Rom. 1:28, 32); by philosophical moralizings which had no fruit in life (Rom. 2:1, 4); by consciences which can only "accuse" or seek to "excuse" but never justify (Rom. 2:5, 16); and finally by the very law in which those who have the law boast (Rom. 2:17; 3:20), "every mouth" is "stopped, and all the world becomes guilty before God."<sup>1</sup> If you count up the number of reasons he lists in Romans 1-3, there are eight. His point is to show that the "whole race, without one single exception, stands guilty and speechless before God." So a man is not condemned only on the basis of lack of faith, he is condemned on a number of counts, yet all these counts are erased when a man by grace has faith in Christ. But before we can get to the grace Paul has to get every man entirely lost.

Beginning the exposition in 2:1 we see Paul stating a future revelation of the wrath of God that men are storing up because they do not respond to God's gracious revelation in conscience. He says, **Therefore you have no excuse, every one of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.** First of all Paul says **you have no excuse.** He said this before in 1:20, "they are without excuse." It is the same Greek word both times, *αναπολογητος*, meaning that legally, before God, you are condemned.

Now in view are those who pass judgment on matters which they themselves have committed. In other words, they are hypocrites. They judge others to be in the wrong but they commit the same wrong. I find it interesting that he says in doing so **you condemn yourself.** In other words, God has no need to condemn you because **you already condemn yourself** in that you pass judgment on others for the very things you do. The conscience will be the witness against them in the Day of Judgment. The conscience, in this sense, is like a tape recorder that records every thought and these thoughts can be called up at the judgment and played back in order to serve as a basis of condemnation. They went against their conscience or did things in opposition to their conscience.

The conscience is an internal arbiter of what is right and what is wrong. It's not the standard itself, it's simply the judge. The standard by which it judges can be wrong. For example, Paul said that he followed good conscience when he murdered Christians and so he followed his conscience but his conscience was being informed by a faulty standard, in his case Christianity was a threat to the truth of Judaism. So his conscience was arbitrating correctly, so far as the standard was concerned, but the standard was incorrect. The lesson to learn here is that your conscience judges infallibly according to the standard in your mind, but your mind can be wrong. That's why Paul will say later, be transformed by the renewing of the mind.

But here these people's conscience is correct in that they are capable of judging correctly that a behavior is wrong but they themselves do the same things, they don't follow their conscience. Instead they sear the conscience. And yet their conscience bears witness that they are condemned and so God will use their conscience as a testimony against themselves that they knew what was wrong and they condemned it, but they practiced it themselves.

Verse 2. **And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things.** That is, **we** believers, **we know.** Perfect tense, we have come to **know** with the effect that we continue to **know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things.** What things? The things listed in 1:24-32, all those vices. Now here we find the **judgment of God** and this judgment, in context, is a future judgment. He will refer to it in verse 5 as “the day of wrath” and in verse 16 as “the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.” So it is a set time or time period in which God will judge.

Now, what we know or have come to know in verse 2 is that God’s judgment **rightly falls upon those who practice such things.** The original says that God’s judgment is **according to truth.** Though it doesn’t say so here God is truth and His judgment is according to the truth that He is. God is just and He always judges justly. There is no injustice in God; He always judges fairly, he does not play favorites but He applies His standards equally to all, no matter who may be involved. The bottom line is they knew better but they did not live according to what they knew. Their conscience was condemning them and they violated their conscience anyway.

Now, having done this, verse 3 asks, **But do you suppose** or think, or reckon **this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God?** Actually they do think this although it’s not something they should think. But people think that they really will escape God’s judgment. Why do people think that they will escape? Because it appears they are getting away with it. They sin, sin, sin and don’t get judged so they think this is going to go on forever. Now the reason we have this and this is part of the answer to the problem of evil. What’s the problem of evil? The problem that if God is all loving then He must not be all powerful because if He was He would remove evil; or if He is all powerful then He must not be all loving because He has not removed evil. So people pit these two attributes of God against each other to argue against the inconsistency of the existence of the Christian God and evil. But part of the answer to the problem of evil is answered in vv 3-4, namely, that there are times in history when God withholds His judgment. We call these time periods common grace. What is

common grace? It's common in that it is grace given to all men. It's grace in that God is giving men what they don't deserve, time to repent. Now the ethics of common grace are ethics that men love because they can sin, sin, sin and seemingly get away with it; there are no immediate consequences even though they know there should be. And after a while people get used to getting away with sin and they draw the wrong conclusion of verse 3, that things will always be this way and that they will escape the judgment of God.

Now the world has lived in a period of common grace twice. Before the Flood and before the Second Coming. And these two are linked to one another throughout Scripture so that we learn to think of the latter in terms of the former. Think about the world before the Flood. The people were having a good time, going about life and God told Noah to warn the world that God was going to suspend the ethics of common grace and exercise the ethics of final judgment. God always gives grace before judgment. For 120 years he warned them. Did people pay attention to Noah's warnings? No, they thought that the ethics of common grace would continue forever because experience told them that they could sin and get away with it, that they could escape the judgment of God. I want to show you three passages that compare that thinking with the thinking of the world before the Second Coming.

First, turn to Matt 24:37. This is set in the context of the coming of the Son of Man, a title that comes out of Dan 7 and relates to the change of kingdoms when the times of Gentile kingdoms comes to a close and the millennial kingdom comes. In verse 37 Jesus says, "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah." In other words, there is a direct comparison between the Flood and the Second Coming. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be." In other words, the people were going about life as if everything was normal, they were living according to the ethics of common grace. When Noah announced a new ethic, the ethics of final judgment, that didn't square with their experience so they wrote Noah off. Noah said judgment is coming and they said, we've been sinning and sinning and sinning and getting away with it so on what basis do you say that we are not going to get away with it? On what basis are we not going to escape? And then suddenly what Noah said happened and the ethics of common grace did

come to an end and they did not escape. That's passage one and passage one says that it will be the same way with the coming of the Son of Man. In other words, everything is going to be hunky dory and then suddenly the ethics of judgment will ensue and the whole world will be overwhelmed in judgment and they will not escape.

Second, turn over to 1 Thess 5:1, same context as Matt 24. Paul says, "Now as to the times and the epochs." This is an expression out of Daniel 2 that refers to changes in kingdoms, the time that Daniel referred to when the times of the Gentile kingdoms will come to an end and the Jewish millennial kingdom would come. In that context Paul says, "For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night." The day of the Lord being the day of intense judgment on all the world. And the nature of its arrival is like a thief, meaning, when people don't expect it. Verse 3, "While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape." What's their ethic just before they are caught unaware? The ethics of common grace, "peace and safety, all is well, there are no interruptions to history." They are sinning, sinning, sinning and getting away with it and then boom, they will not escape. But we, verse 4, we are not in the darkness so that the day would overtake us like a thief. Verse 9, For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation...So we are exempt from this day but they are not exempt. They will not escape. That's passage two and it shows that they will get used to the ethics of common grace to the point that they cannot even possibly imagine any interruptions to the way the world is now.

Third, turn over to 2 Pet 3, again, same context, this one also compares Christ's Second Coming back to the world before the Flood. Note verse 3, "Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming?" Jesus isn't coming back. You Christians keep saying He's coming back. I don't see Him coming back. And here's their ethic at the end of verse 4, "For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." What's the argument? There are no other ethics besides common grace ethics. We can get away with anything. Verse 5, "For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by



water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water.” In other words, what happened to their common grace ethics? They got shattered. Suddenly the Flood of Noah overwhelmed the world and carried them all away. And now he likens that time and world to this time and world in verse 7. “But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.” In other words, what is going to happen again to the common grace ethics that men love so much because they can get away with anything? They’re going to be suspended and in their place will come judgment and destruction. Verse 8, what’s the lesson? “But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day.” What’s the point? Don’t delay. Get right with God now because who knows when the judgment is coming. Verse 9, “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.” And then he goes on to tell us how suddenly the day of the Lord will come. So the lesson is to repent because there is still time, God is very patient, He doesn’t want anyone to perish but for all to come to repentance. What does he want them to have a change about? About verse 4, that all continues just as it was from the beginning and there are no major interruptions in history. They better have a change of mind about that or else they’re going to misread history and it’s going to be too late. God is very patient. That’s part of the reason God hasn’t judged yet. He’s patient and He’s allowing you time to repent. The ethics of common grace will not continue forever.

Finally, back to Romans 2 and tell me this passage isn’t the same type of context. Verse 3, **But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God?** They do think this. Verse 4, **Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?** They do think lightly of the riches of His kindness and His putting up with their sin, His **tolerance** and His **patience**, His long fuse. Do they not know that this is God’s kindness which is instrumental in leading them to repentance? This is not funny. The only reason history is continuing is because God is rich in kindness and tolerance and patience and He wants men to repent. Repent, have a change of mind. A change of mind about what in context? About suppressing the truth they know about Him in

unrighteousness. Why do they need to repent about Him? Because He's who they need to face. They need to acknowledge Him. They've drawn a wrong conclusion from getting away with sin. They've concluded they'll escape judgment. They should have drawn the conclusion that God was being patient with them, giving them time to repent. It's a sad, sad picture, but why do they need to repent concerning Him? Because repentance toward God is preparatory for preaching faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul didn't preach the gospel of Jesus Christ before He called for repentance toward God. Acts 20:21, what did Paul testify to both Jews and Gentiles? Repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. These were the two steps in his evangelistic encounters in the Book of Acts. He never even brought in Jesus Christ unless people repented toward God. Paul always started with God. Why is He doing that? To prepare them for Jesus Christ. Take a quick look as we close at Acts 17. In verse 22, when he starts his address to the Athenians, scan through the address and tell me if you see anywhere Jesus Christ? There's a whole lot about God but nothing about Jesus Christ? Why not? Because you've got to get a person's eyes on God before you can get their eyes on Jesus Christ. And that's what Paul's trying to do here, he's reminding them of God and what does he call for in verse 30? He says God has been overlooking the times of ignorance. What ethic have they been living according to? The ethics of common grace, they were sinning and getting away with it. But what's he saying now? That God is declaring to men that all everywhere should repent. Why? Because "He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead." That's the closest he got to preaching Jesus Christ but he didn't mention Jesus Christ by name, he merely referred to One that God has appointed to judge. What's the key issue? Judgment. God is going to judge so repent, have a change of mind about God because these ethics aren't going to go on forever, if they did repent then Paul would preach faith in Christ. Which is what he did to the few who did repent in vv 33-34. There were a few who followed him afterward, they wanted to know more about this God and so Paul obviously explained it and then preached faith in Christ and they believed.

It was repentance toward God first as a preparation for faith in Christ. That is always the way you see it in Scripture. The issue is always God first. Who's God? What's God like? And He's the issue in Romans 2. People can go around thinking they can get away with their sin but they're not getting away with

anything; God is very kind and He's being patient with them and it is His kind patience that is instrumental in bringing men to repentance. So don't push Him, don't get mad at Him, get your eyes on Him and repent, have a change of mind about Him, then we'll talk about faith in Christ and why that's so important. Time is running out, it's an urgent appeal, common grace will not go on forever.

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<sup>i</sup> Scofield, C. I. (2005). *Chapter VII: The Grace of God* (Vol. 3, p. 98). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

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