

Romans 2 (1-3) – You Have No Excuse

There are many people in this world who've never heard about Jesus. And so, a common question is, "What about all the people who've never heard of Jesus, will God condemn them?" Maybe you've heard it like this: "How can God send someone to hell for not believing in Jesus when they have never even heard of Jesus?" It may even be hostile, "So you believe that people go to hell just because they're ignorant? Well, you're a religious bigot!"

Now some people may have this question in mind because they are truly seeking to know the answer. However, there have always been people who aren't looking for an answer, they are just interested in condemning God and justifying themselves.

So, let's explore this idea. Is it evil for God to punish ignorant people?

Well, consider our own legal system in the United States. I'm sure you've heard the phrase, "ignorance of the law is no excuse." However, God does take ignorance into consideration, even if we don't. And before you challenge God as to punishing ignorant people, you need to challenge the assumption that people are completely ignorant of God.

So, the question is, are there people in the world who are completely ignorant of God?

And that brings us to Romans 1:19-20 – *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.*

Here, and in other places in the Bible we are told that God has revealed himself to all people in **the light of creation**. Listen to Psalm 19:1-4 – *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech,*

nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.

Anyone of any age of any time who has seen the stars in the sky realizes they were not created by us. They point to something greater than us. Even for those who are physically blind, down here on earth, everyone encounters the creation of God. And people can try and philosophize or reason their way out of it all, but everyone knows in their heart that this universe has a design that points to its ultimate designer.

You may say, “Well that’s not enough!” Well, the Bible says that the light of creation isn’t the only light that God has given to every person in the world.

In Romans 2:14-16, we see a second light that God has given to every person in the world. It is **the light of conscience**. *For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.*

God has placed a moral compass in people so that they know some things are right and some things are wrong. Of course, as people violate their conscience it becomes less reliable. But it can be trained by obeying the word of God, or it can be corrupted by violating the word of God. Still, it never fully goes away. And the fact that all people have something of a conscience is apparent to everyone.

So, after saying that no one has an excuse for not following God because of the light of creation in Romans 1, Paul says that we have no excuse because of the light of conscience in Romans 2. Again, Romans 2:1-3 says – *Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such*

things. Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God?

The Apostle Paul is speaking there of the Jews who judge the Gentiles for the catalogue of sins he mentions from Romans 1:23-32. And then in Romans 2:13, Paul states “...it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.” He says that it is not simply knowing the will of God but doing it that matters. And then from vs.14-16 he tells us that while the Gentiles may not have been given the written law of God by Moses, they have that law written on their conscience, and if they obey it, they are better off than those Jews who had been given the law but did not obey it. But later, he says, no one does obey the law. Some people are more moral than others, they don’t violate the law of God on their conscience to the same degree as others, but they are still guilty. As James 2:10 says, “...whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.”

Paul concludes his point in Romans 3:19-20 – *Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.* Paul repeats this truth in Galatians 2:16 – *yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.*

So, there’s the true situation. All people know of God, and all are guilty of sin, and they all know it. As Romans 3:23 says, *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* People may suppress the truth with their unrighteousness, but make no mistake, everyone knows in their heart that there is a God. You can see it in the stars, and you can sense it in your conscience.

Still, there is a third light. And at the end of Romans 3 Paul declares **the light of Christ.**

Romans 3:21-26 says – *But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

Jesus Christ took upon himself all the guilt of our sin and suffered the wrath of God as punishment for it. In doing so, Jesus took our place, and paid for all the sins of those who would place their faith in him, giving us a place in heaven for eternity. We deserved to be punished. We didn’t deserve to be rewarded. But Jesus took what we deserved and gave us what we didn’t deserve. This is the light of the mercy and grace of God in Jesus Christ.

However, it is not mandatory for God to extend this light to everyone. Indeed, God does not have the obligation to extend this light to anyone. God is our judge, and a judge must be just, but he doesn’t have to pardon any criminal. And just because he pardons one person doesn’t mean he must pardon every person.

Imagine if the President pardoned every criminal in the country at the same time. No jails, no justice. No one would be good with that decree. But somehow people think that God owes grace to every person. But friends, grace is not owed to anyone, otherwise it is not grace, but debt. And God is not in debt to anyone, we are the ones who owe him.

As the song goes, He paid a debt He did not owe, I owed a debt I could not pay, I needed someone to wash my sins away. And now I sing a brand-new song, Amazing Grace. Christ Jesus paid a debt that I could never pay. God is gracious to guilty sinners. But he doesn’t have to be gracious to any guilty sinner.

So, the light of Christ is not extended to everyone, but it is to be offered to the entire world. And as Romans 9:18 says, God *has mercy on whomever he wills*. You see the exclusivity of the gospel in that, as Romans 9:16 says, *it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy*. But you also see the inclusivity of the gospel, in that the Bible tells us repeatedly that no one is kept out because of race, or gender, or age, or social status.

As Mark 16:15 says, *“Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.”* And as Revelation 5:9 says, *“...I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne.”* Indeed, as Romans 10:13 says, *...everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved*. Everyone is invited to come. But only those who receive the light will come.

So, now you have seen that no one is completely ignorant of God. Still, let's apply some logic to the idea that it is evil for God to punish people who are ignorant of Jesus.

Looking at it in terms of the past, over 2000 years ago, before Jesus came, there were no Christians. So, if ignorance of Jesus is an excuse, then everyone who lived before Jesus automatically went to heaven. And now think of it; if that were true, then by coming into the world, Jesus automatically condemned millions of people. Instead of being our great redeemer he would be our great ruin. He came into a world that was already saved and became the villain that sent millions to hell. Of course, we know that isn't true. We needed redemption, and Jesus Christ came to save sinners.

Looking at it in terms of the future, if ignorance of Jesus is an excuse, then we should end all evangelism efforts right now, and bring all our missionaries back home. In fact, we should close every church immediately, ban the Bible completely, and stop the mention of Jesus permanently.

If ignorance of Jesus is an excuse, then the worst thing in the world you could do is to tell someone about Jesus. It wouldn't be loving; it would be evil to

mention his name. The obvious absurdity of that points out the ignorance of the so-called ignorance defense.

Every person is sinful, as the Bible declares, society proves, and your conscience agrees. Your only hope is a sinless sin-bearing savior, and so the only savior is Jesus Christ.

However, even some Christians still want to make use of some sort of an ignorance defense. As if God extends some sort of special dispensation to those who have never heard the gospel. It may make you feel more comfortable, but this is not what the Bible teaches. The Bible clearly teaches that everyone has enough light to do what's right, but they don't. And that without Christ, sinful people, and that's every person, is lost and without hope. Therefore, it is our responsibility, your responsibility, your opportunity, to tell them about Jesus.

Indeed, even as Romans 10:13 says that *everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved*, Romans 10:14 says, *"How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?"*

If you are not a Christian today, you have heard the gospel, and the light of Jesus has shined here today. Will you receive his light? Will you confess that you are a sinner, that you want Jesus to save you, and that he will be your Lord? After this day, you have no excuse. Today is your day of salvation!

If you are a Christian, you are also without excuse. You are not ignorant of what Jesus wants you to do with your life. You are called to bring the light of Christ to a lost and dying world. Today is your day to declare salvation!

What are you waiting for? Come down here, and be prayed for. Then go out there, and shine as a light for Christ.

Amen.