



Sermon Growth Guide

Author: Jeff McCrory, Pastor

Diagnosis of the Heart | Romans 2:1-11

February 1, 2026

Key Verse: “You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself” - Romans 2:1

Big Idea: It is easy to judge others. When we do judge others, we condemn ourselves because we all fall short of God’s glory, Rom 3:23.

Foundations

There is something very satisfying and self-affirming in hearing the faults of others. We enjoy pointing out the wrongs of those not like us. We say to ourselves, “Oh, look at what those-kind-of-people do. We’re not like them.” When we do this, we feel good about ourselves in comparison to those bad people. Paul in writing to the Romans divides the world into Jews and Gentiles, Rom 1:16. These are the two groups of people who make up the Roman church. While these groups were two ethnic groups in Paul’s time, they are also two ways of living in the world, “apart from the law” = Gentiles, and “under the law” = Jews, Romans 2:12. When Paul speaks of “apart from the law” and “under the law,” we must ask what he means by “law.” Law for Paul means Torah, the foundational Jewish story. So, Jews live under the foundational story in Genesis to Deuteronomy. What about the Gentiles? When Paul says “apart from the law” he does not mean lawless but apart from Torah. Gentiles live not under Torah but under what we might call First Principles or Natural Law. Gentiles know from the creation certain truths about God (Romans 1:20-21). This is their living law. So, when we read Romans 2:1-11 we should hear not Jew and Gentile, but those who live by the Book = Bible, we church people, and those who live by their inner sense of right and wrong, those folks out there.

Understanding God’s Word

Read Romans 2:1-11 together. Who is “you” in verse one? In the Greek text, “you” is literally “O man,” a fictitious interlocutor in an ancient argument style called a diatribe. The King James Version brings this out clearly: “Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man!” Paul is using an imaginary opponent in a very sneaky way to address those who judge Gentiles, that is Jews, people of the Book, we church Christians.

Applying God’s Word

Share how easy and fulfilling it is to judge someone not a part of the Christian community. Feel the satisfaction of condemning someone out there, even if those out there deserve it. The problem with condemning those out there is that we in here are also at fault. We think we are better, more moral, and righteous. We like Pharaoh harden our hearts and refuse to hear the intent of the Gospel, that the goodness of God, giving us the Bible, is meant to lead us to repentance, to self-examination and turning.

Witnessing God’s Word

What do we do with such a self-condemning indictment from Paul? The truth is that we all judge others, especially we church folk. How do we stop this? A daily Examen helps, when at the end of the day we examine how we fall short of God’s glory. This is also echoed in Alcoholics Anonymous 10th step, “Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.”

I do not want to preach this sermon. Two weeks ago I emailed Pastor Tim and complained, “Oh thrill, you and I get the ‘bad dog’ passages in Romans, condemning those out there, Romans 1, and those in here, Romans 2. Isn’t this fun!”

It may not be fun but it is healing to hear our true diagnosis. It is easy to judge others. When we do, we condemn ourselves because we do the same things.

I. Bad Dog

I hated that dog! When I was growing up we lived across the street from a family that had a large male Collie named Prince. We had at the time a small English Springer Spaniel name Derby. It was before anyone knew anything about leash laws. Dogs ran freely on our street. Regularly Prince would come over the edge of our yard and start barking until Derby would come out and defend his yard. Numerous times Prince would maul Derby, and we would end up at the Vet’s office having Derby stitched up.

I hated that dog and would throw rocks at him anytime he came near our yard. Prince was a bad dog. I hated that dog and he deserved it.

Do you know how I feel?

II. Gentiles and Jews

There are no bad and good dogs in the letter to Rome but Paul does divide the world up into Gentiles and Jews. Listen to his thematic statement in the letter to the Romans

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that

brings salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew and then to the Greek, Rom 1:16.

In the congregation at Rome there were Jews and Greeks, or what we call Gentiles, real people that Tim mentioned a few weeks back. In 49 AD Emperor Claudius expelled Jews from Rome. That left only Gentile believers in the church, so called Greek God Fearers. Later, after Claudius dies in 54, and by the time Paul writes the Roman letter, about 57, the Jews returned to Rome. So, both Jews and Gentiles are in the Roman church.

But . . . and here’s where we come in, Paul also uses Jews and Gentiles as two ways that people respond to the presence of God in the world, those who are “under the law,” meaning who live by the Torah, the Book; and those who are “apart from the law,” (Romans 2:12), those who live by what we would call First Principles, Aristotle’s term, or Natural Law, that which Paul describes in Romans 1, knowledge of the creator, Rom 1:20. So, Jews means Book people. This is who we are. Gentiles means non-Book people, those folks out there. Jews = those in here; Gentiles = those out there.

This makes the argument in Romans 2:1-11 come alive for us. We are Book people. We have our Bible. Those out there are not Book people, they don’t claim to live by the Bible. They aren’t lawless but they aren’t us.

Now we get to Prince and Derby. For the sake of argument, we are Derby and they are Prince. We like throwing rocks at Prince, those folks who are out there, the people Paul indicts in Romans 1, those whom Tim mentioned last week. They come near our yard barking, and we start

throwing rocks at them. Get out of here you bad dog!

III. Paul's Sneaky Argument

How does Paul address us who think we are good dogs, us Book people? The Greek text of Romans 2:1 reads this way

Therefore, without excuse (same word as in Romans 1:20) are you, O Man!

Paul is using a rhetorical style called a diatribe. This is a way of arguing that sneaks up on you to deliver a punch. He sets this up in Romans 1 with a bunch of therefore's, in Greek the particle *dio* and its variations. We read right past them in English but they are glaring in Greek. What is also glaring is the way Paul encourages his readers to condemn those out there with each therefore. I am going to over emphasize the therefore's to give you the rhetorical punch.

Rom 1:19, Therefore what is known about God is plain to them

Yes, throw a rock at them

Rom 1:21, Therefore they knew God but they did not glorify him

Oh, yes, throw another rock

Rom 1:24. Therefore God gave them over

Take that, throw another rock

Rom 1:26, Therefore God gave them over to shameful lusts

Ooo! Throw yet another rock

"Sometimes," like Forrest Gump says, "there are just not enough rocks."

But then Paul catches them off-guard, for he says in Romans 2:1

Therefore . . . and they pick up more rocks ready to throw.

"Therefore, without excuse are you, O Man!"

He's talking about us not them out there. Wait a minute, I was enjoying throwing rocks at them out there. It's like Jesus with the woman caught in adultery, "Let you who are without sin cast the first rock."

IV. Diagnosis of Our Heart

Paul is talking about us who throw rocks at those out there. Let's look at the passage again.

You (US) therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you (WE) judge the other, you (WE) are condemning yourself, because you (WE) who pass judgment do the same things.

9 There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew (THAT'S US) then for the Gentile (THAT'S THOSE OUT THERE); 10 but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. 11 For God does not show favoritism.

Wow! I want favoritism, don't you? I like all the therefore's until he gets to us, O Man and Woman!

Here's the condemnation that we need to hear. Here is the diagnosis of our sick heart. We, you and I, not just you out there but me up here, the choir, the

leaders, are just as bad dogs as those who are out there. In some ways we are worse because we know better. We know that God's kindness to us, giving us the Bible and Jesus, should lead us to repentance, turn us around, but we persist in throwing rocks at Prince, those out there who bark at the edge of our yards.

V. Heart Treatment

What are we to do with this heart diagnosis? Wretched people that we are, who will heal us?

I want to give you some spiritual practices, means of grace that help the Holy Spirit heal us. These come from my own practices. Besides being a pastor and an Old Testament professor, I am a trained Spiritual Director. What is a Spiritual Direction, Jeff? It coming alongside another to help them see and respond to Jesus. I like the definition Robert Mulholland Jr. gives in his book *Invitation to a Journey*

Spiritual Formation (Direction) is a process of being formed into the image of Christ for the sake of others.

How does this happen for us? How are we formed into the image of Christ for others, those out there? It happens when we employ the means of grace God the Spirit works in our lives.

Two practices help me.

One, a daily Examen.

This comes from a practice started by Ignatius of Loyola. At the end of each

day I review how I have strayed from God and how I have stayed near God. These Ignatius calls desolations and consolations. Where have I strayed and where have I stayed? I ponder these and alternately ask forgiveness and give thanks.

Second, a practice that comes from Alcoholics Anonymous step 10

We continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

I have to practice saying, "I'm wrong." The words "I'M WR-ONG" don't come easily out of my mouth.

I told you I did not want to preach this sermon, but I need to preach this sermon. We need a heart diagnosis, those of us, me included who like throwing rocks at those out there. How does the Holy Spirit treat us? By stopping to take account each day and by admitting when we are wrong.