

Judgment of the Unrighteous
Romans 2:5-

Judgment of the Unrighteous

Have you ever seen a suitcase warrior pack a suitcase? Actually, such a woman will often travel with multiple suitcases. A proper lady must have appropriate clothing for any situation. She makes many trips to the closet to retrieve a full wardrobe for a few days journey. At some point, there will be a pile of clothes to rival the tower of Babylon. The husband's help is often enlisted to sit on the suitcase while she zips it closed.

Paul has done something similar in the book of Romans. He has packed a pile of information into this book. Great care must be taken when unpacking the meaning and application of this great book. Let us attempt to unpack Romans 2:5-6.

Look at two different translations of Romans 2:5-6. What is different? Why?

Romans 2:5 (NASB) But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, (comma)

Romans 2:6 who (relative pronoun who) will render to each person according to his deeds:

Romans 2:5 (NIV) But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. (period)

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Romans 2:6 God (relative pronoun translated as God) “will repay each person according to what they have done.”

A problem in unpacking the translation of the Greek occurs at the boundary between Romans 2:5 and Romans 2:6. The NASB translation, as does the KJV, puts a comma at the end of verse five and translates the relative pronoun in verse six as “who” relating verse six as a continuation of verse five. In this translation, verse 6 is a dependent clause of verse 5. The thought of verse 5 continues into verse 6.

Remember a few weeks ago the lesson on commas? Take the following example:

A woman without her man is nothing.

It is ambiguous without a comma. But where will you put the comma? It depends upon the meaning you wish to convey.

Solution 1: A woman, without her man, is nothing.

Solution 2: A woman, without her, man is nothing.

So here in Romans 2:5-6, the question is comma or period?

The NASB and KJV both go with a comma. They translate the relative pronoun as “who.”

However, the NIV, NET and other translations go with a period. They translate the relative pronoun as “He” or “God.”

Why? Sounds like high school homework. That pesky why? The following three points provide an intro into the explanations.

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1. Vocabulary identifies a “bracket.”
2. Verbs change from second person plural to third person.
3. Verbs change from a preponderance of present tenses to a preponderance of future tenses. God’s wrath in time versus consequences in the eternal judgment.

The vocabulary of verses 1-5 identify it as a “bracket” or “inclusio” the more technical term. The particular word is “wrath.” From Wikipedia:

“In biblical studies, inclusio is a literary device similar to a refrain. It is also known as bracketing or an envelope structure, and consists of the repetition of material at the beginning and end of a section of text.”

“The purpose of an inclusio may be structural - to alert the reader to a particularly important theme - or it may serve to show how the material within the inclusio relates to the inclusio itself.¹”

Notice the use of the term “wrath” in Romans 1:18 and twice in Romans 2:5. It forms an “inclusio.”

Romans 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

...

Romans 2:5 But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inclusio>

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Shakespeare did something similar in some of his plays. Take for instance Macbeth at the end of Act I. There is a rhyming couplet that tells the audience, end of this act.

“Away, and mock the time with fairest show:
False face must hide what the false heart doth know.”

The verbs in verses one through five are in the second person plural. (ya’ll in Texan). Starting in verse six, the verbs slip into third person. There is a change.

Romans 2:5 (NASB) But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day (literally, “a day of wrath) of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, (Should be a period instead of a comma)

Romans 2:7 to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life;

Romans 2:8 but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.

Shift in person is, I think, an underappreciated literary technique.

There is a **subtle time shift** in the action of God’s wrath and its consequences starting in verse 6. The wrath of God is revealed in the present time in Romans 1:18. Then, starting in Romans 2:6 there is a shift to a preponderance of future tenses looking toward final judgment of the unbeliever at the Great White Throne. Although the Great White

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Throne Judgment is not specifically mentioned, the judgment of works is emphasized.

Romans 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed (present tense) from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

...

Romans 2:6 who will render to each person according to his deeds:

Romans 2:7 to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life;

...

Romans 2:12 For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law;

Up till now, I have said little about the paragraph structure of this section of Romans. Douglas Moo suggests there are three paragraphs: 2:1-5, 2:6-11, 12-16². There is a relative pronoun at the beginning of verse 6 in the Greek that most translators use to begin a dependent clause referring back to verses 1-5. However, there is a break in the “person.” Verses 1-5 are addressed to “you” the moral man. Starting in verse 6, the discussion is in the third person. There is a shift. This is part of Paul’s intricate dance with the syntax and grammar.

² Moo, D.J. (1996). *The Epistle to the Romans*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. Page 127. Robby Dean agrees with this structure.

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So why all the fuss about the structure. It is to get to some logical outline that provides a suggested progression in the dynamic of the meaning:

Wrath of God (1:18-23)

First Consequence (Immoral Degeneracy in time 1:24-32)

Second Consequence (Moral Degeneracy in time 2:1-5)

End Time Consequences of Rejection of God (2:6-16)

Romans 2:5 (NASB) But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day (literally, “a day of wrath”) of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, (Should be a period instead of a comma)

Robby Dean makes the point that the “day of wrath” in verse 5 is actually “a” day of wrath. It is not until verse 6 that we get to the final judgment.

“If we read that superficially it is easy to think that this is talking about a future day of judgment. But the way Paul uses the term “wrath” in Romans is not talking about future judgment in the Tribulation or eternal condemnation. He talks about it in the present tense; cf. 1:18, “the wrath of God is being revealed.” This is the judgment or the discipline of God upon rebellious mankind, both as a whole and individually, during history. Literally in the Greek here it doesn’t say “in the day of wrath,” it says “in *a* day of wrath”—no definite article there.³”

Those who understand this as eternal punishment supply “the.” But the Greek does not have a definite article.

Moving on to verse 6, finally.

³ <https://deanbible.org/new-testament-menuitem/romans-menuitem/message/2010-romans-024b/read>

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**Romans 2:6 who will render to each person
according to his deeds:**

This is a quote from Psalm 62:12 and/or Proverbs 24:12. Both say the same thing.

Who. This is according to the NASB. The NIV and NET translations have “He.” Explanation above provides the rationale for this translation.

**Psalm 62:12 And lovingkindness is Yours, O
Lord, For You recompense (intensive form of
the verb) a man according to his work.**

It will be a useful exercise to read the entire Psalm 62. So open your Bibles and let us read it together.

Recompense. From the Cambridge dictionary: “to give something to someone as a payment or reward for their efforts or loss⁴”

The Hebrew word for “recompense” used in Psalm 62 can mean, in the intensive form of the verb (Piel), restitution. In other words, to make something right. Human beings have sin natures. We sin. We cannot make those sins right before God. That is why Jesus went to the cross. In the story of the village idiot, he said, “Jesus died for sinners. I am a sinner. Jesus died for me.”

Thomas Constable comments on the opening of the quoted Psalm 62.

“A literal translation of the first line would be, “My soul finds rest in God alone.” That idea is the theme of this psalm (cf. v. 5). Rather than looking to other people for encouragement and security, David looked to God alone for these needs (cf. Exod. 14:14; Isa. 30:15). He did this because he

4 <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/recompensed>

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had discovered that God Himself was responsible for his deliverance. He had been a rock and a stronghold for the psalmist in the past.⁵”

The bottom line is that God, in the final judgments looks at works. That may sound crazy but it is true. Why? Because Jesus went to the cross and paid the eternal penalty of sin, all sins. But unbelievers cannot go to heaven and instead go to the Lake of Fire because they do not have everlasting life nor God's righteousness. Those familiar with R. B. Thieme Jr.'s “barrier” understand that the barrier between God and man includes sin, righteousness and life. Sin was taken care of at the cross. But God's character in the context of the Angelic Conflict requires an unbeliever to trust in God's solution, Jesus Christ on the cross. God cannot just give life and righteousness to an unbeliever without the involvement of faith. It would pervert God's justice. But faith is all that is needed. So if sin is taken care of, there are two items that must be “imputed” or given to a believer: righteousness and life. Righteousness is based upon the righteous work of Jesus Christ. Life is everlasting or sometimes called eternal life when imputed at the point of faith. Abraham was the illustration of the righteousness aspect:

Genesis 15:6 Then he (Abraham) believed in the Lord; and He (God) reckoned (imputation) it to him as righteousness.

In Revelation 20, it is the book of life that is opened.

Revelation 20:11 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them.

5 <https://planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/psalms.pdf>, page 256

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Revelation 20:12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.

Those who have not believed do not have the works, the righteous deeds of Jesus to point to. They must be judged upon their own good works. But God's righteous standard is perfection. There cannot be a single sin. And yet, mankind is under sin times three: a) Imputation of Adam's sin (we are in Adam) b) individual sin nature acquired at birth and c) individual sins that inevitably are generated from the sin nature. It is not possible to do perfectly righteous deeds.

Isaiah 64:6 For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

A filthy garment. This is a poor translation. Although not literal, "used toilet paper" communicates God's disgust at "human" righteousness. It is not perfect so it is not acceptable.

Garment. Garment or perhaps cloth, rag.

Filthy. Per Biblehub.com

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Brown-Driver-Briggs

[עֲדָה] **noun feminine menstruation**, so Vrss (properly *time, period*);
– plural absolute עֲדָהּ עֲדָהּ **Isaiah 64:5** i.e. stained garment (figurative
of best deeds of guilty people; אֲחֵי אֲחֵי).

Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, Unabridged, Electronic Database.

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Revelation 20:13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. (Their deeds are judged against the perfect righteousness of God.)

Revelation 20:14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.

Revelation 20:15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, (no eternal life means there is nothing left but the second death in the Lake of Fire) he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Matthew 16:27 For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every man according to his deeds.

You know an Old Testament passage is important when it is quoted multiple times in the New Testament.

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Titus 3:5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,

Galatians 2:16 nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.

Romans 2:7 to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life;

Romans 2:8 but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.

Romans 2:9 *There will be* tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek,

Romans 2:10 but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

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**Romans 2:11 For there is no partiality with
God.**