



# Mooroolbark Christian Fellowship

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# “Healing”

By

**Joseph Tkach**



God performed dramatic miracles in the Old Testament and in the New. Many of these were dramatic healings. God still heals today. He still gives financial blessings, emotional blessings, spiritual gifts and other miracles.

However, we cannot claim any guarantees—except that God will do what is best for us in the long run. We can claim only the right to ask for whatever we want (Phil. 4:6), and know that we receive blessings from our good and wise Dad in heaven, even though the blessings do not always come in a form we would have chosen.

Sometimes the answer to our prayers for help comes as soon as we ask, sometimes it comes after years of persistent prayer, and sometimes it comes without our even asking. God cares about us, knows what is right and good for us, and we have to trust him.

Some Christians get enormous financial blessings. Most do not. Some get spectacular gifts. Most do not. And some get miraculous healings. But again, most do not. Those who are physically healthy can be thankful for their health, and pray for wisdom that they are using their health in a way that pleases God. But those who are sick often struggle with many questions, perhaps chief among them the question of why God has not healed them.

Rumour has it that sudden wealth can be hard for the newly wealthy person's friends and family. One study of lottery winners shows that some of the effects of sudden wealth were greedy friends, jealousy among family members and strained relationships in general. Blessings for Christians can also have a down side: unrealistic expectations, envy, unfavourable comparisons.

The same can be true with miraculous healing. It would be natural for people who continue in illness to have mixed feelings about those who are healed. It would be natural to ask: “Why them and not me? What have they done that I have not?” A miracle for one person might be discouraging for another

person—or it can give hope. The sick person might think: “The God who intervened for that person, for no reason that I can understand, may yet intervene for me. Or he may not. He knows best, and I just have to trust him. At least I know he is able to do it.”

That's the bottom line as we wait for God: trust. We walk by faith, not by sight, and God acts for reasons that we cannot see. We might think that an immediate healing is in our best interest, but God has a higher perspective, and perhaps we are simply unable to understand the complexity—or the importance—of what God is working out in our lives.

With that in mind, I thought it might be helpful for me to address a few points about healing.

### **Anointing**

Some have asked whether we encourage sick people to be anointed by the elders of the church. Yes, we do, following the instruction in James 5:14-15, which tells us: “Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up.”

Why are we to anoint with oil? There is no magic in the oil, of course. It is a symbol. Oil was a medical ointment of the time (Luke 10:34), and the elder (representing the church) uses a token amount of it to symbolize the church's concern and practical care for the sick. And hopefully the elder's prayer is representative of the prayers being offered for the person by the whole church.

Such prayers are offered in faith, that is, in trusting God that he will do what is right and good in this situation. Such prayers are not offered merely with the intention of getting what we, in our limited perspective, want. It is an active expression of putting ourselves, and those we care about, in the hands of our gracious God whom we trust to stand with us no matter how bad things seem to be.

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At certain times in the church's history, miraculous healing has been common. At other times, it has been rare. The curious thing is that in our own lives it sometimes seems that miracles are more common when our faith is weak, and less common as we mature in the faith—as we learn to trust God more fully with our lives and seem to have less physical evidence of his presence. “Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression?” cried the Psalmist (Psalm 44:24).

Regardless of where on the maturity level we think we are, regardless of how much faith we think we have, our hope is still in God, and we display that trust as we call for the elders, pray in faith and trust in God to do what is right and good for us.

### Medicine

Some have also wondered whether it would be a lack of faith if they use medicine or surgery. The answer is no. We should all realize that no medicine or surgery is a guarantee of health. Some people who use medicine have no faith, while others have much faith. Faith and medical science are not a matter of “either/or.” Faith does not mean that we refuse to do anything to help our situation (this is just as true for health concerns as it is for financial concerns or safety concerns). Faith should be combined with wisdom in using sensible methods that are within our means.

There is no spiritual virtue in avoiding treatment or in using “natural” treatments, as though such treatments are more “spiritual” or “faithful” than conventional medical techniques. Choices of treatment should be based on many factors, including likelihood of success, quality of care, cost and common sense. God does not only work through special supernatural intervention. He is also continually at work through his creation. Theologian Millard Erickson explains it in terms of God being both transcendent (different from creation) and immanent:

The meaning of immanence is that God is present and active within his creation, and within the human race, even those members of it that do not believe in or obey him. His influence is everywhere... Immanence signifies that God does much of his work through natural means. He is not restricted to miracles. He even uses ordinary unbelieving humans such as Cyrus, whom he described as his ‘shepherd,’ his ‘anointed’ (Isa. 44:28; 45:1). He uses technology and human skill and learning...

If we emphasize transcendence too much... we may expect God to work miracles at all times, while he may purpose instead to work through our effort. We may tend to mistrust the creation, forgetting that he himself is present and active there. We may depreciate the value of what non-Christians do...

God is not limited to working directly to accomplish his purposes. While it is very obviously a work of God when his people pray and a miraculous healing occurs, it is also God's work when through the application of medical knowledge and skill a physician is successful in bringing a patient back to health. Medicine is part of God's general revelation, and the work of a doctor is a channel of God's activity... God is providentially at work as much in the cure wrought by the physician as in a miraculous healing” (*Introducing Christian Doctrine*, pp. 76-77, 134).

So I encourage sick people to consult a doctor, to gather information, to get a second doctor's opinion if necessary, and to use good judgment in what they do—and especially to rely on God in faith for guidance and wisdom. The meaning of life is found in God, not in physical health, medicine, surgery or miraculous healing. We are to be good stewards of the bodies he has given us, and to make wise decisions about what we do with those bodies.

### Redemption of our bodies

Here's a third question: What is the theology of healing? What gives God the “right” to intervene in our physiology? I see a twin foundation for his healing work in our lives: creation and redemption. He can intervene in nature because he created it, and because he redeemed it through the death of his Son.

Paul writes, “God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him [Jesus Christ], and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (Col. 1:19-20). Through Christ, God has redeemed all creation. Though sin corrupted the creation, God redeems it (Rom. 8:19-23). Creation belongs to him, and he can do with it whatever he wants. He can work through natural processes, or he can intervene in supernatural ways.

But we do not yet see the liberation promised for all creation (Rom. 8:21); nor do we see the redemption of our bodies (v. 23). It will be done when Christ returns, but for now we live in a world that is still in bondage to corruption. We see a conflict between present reality and the promise of Christ. That is where faith enters, and as Hebrews 11 makes plain, faith means believing in realities we do not yet see.

It takes more faith to trust God when we are not healed, than to trust him when we are. When we receive what we hope for, then it is visible, in the realm of sight, no longer of faith. Faith looks to the future, and trusts in God whether or not we are healed.

God still heals in miraculous ways. A healing might be compared to the spies sent into the Promised Land, who brought back some of the fruit of the land even before the Israelites occupied the land. In a similar

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way, a miraculous healing is like a foray into the future, bringing back a token of the redemption that Christ achieved on the cross. It is only a token—our future bodies will be far better than anything we know in this age. Even the greatest miracle of this age (raising a dead person, perhaps) is only a shadow of greater things to come.

Miracles should increase our faith in God, our trust in him. Faith does not mean a belief in guaranteed

miracles, for God has not promised us that. Faith means trusting in God even when there are no miracles. And when we hear of miracles, we can rejoice with those who rejoice, without ceasing to trust in God to do what is good and right for us. We have resources at our disposal, and he expects us to use them wisely. But no matter what we do, we are to trust in him.

**Joseph Tkach**

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# **Window on the World**

From Randal Dick, superintendent of missions



## **Show up... declare... or win?**

How would Christ have us preach the gospel? Three broad approaches are in use today. Evangelism can be thought of as presence, proclamation or persuasion.

Persuasion evangelism (which of course involves being present and declaring the gospel at the appropriate juncture) is by far the most effective and biblically supported model. In fact, it is falling short of Christ's intent for us to allow ourselves to define presence or proclamation evangelism as an end in itself.

This is not to say that the activities involved in presence or proclamation evangelism are not good Christian endeavours, but we must look through Christ's eyes and realize that even those who are not in Christ can alleviate suffering and do good works. But only those who are in Christ can lead others to Christ.

Most of all God desires for those we evangelise to share eternity with him. That is his first priority. That's why Paul, though he cared very much for the needy (consider the offering for the saints in famine-stricken Judea), he sought by all means to persuade people of salvation through Jesus Christ.

However, sometimes we face a situation where persuasion is either not possible or too dangerous.

Sometimes even proclamation (see below: Proclamation Gone Wrong) is not viable. In those cases, we revert to presence evangelism, but we never resign ourselves to making presence or proclamation our only goal—we always strive to return to persuasion evangelism.

The church's efforts in Bangladesh are an ideal example. Bangladesh is one of the most difficult mission fields in the world, and therefore one of the areas that has the greatest need for the gospel. John Biswas began with proclamation evangelism. Before long, several gospel workers were nearly killed, and our training facility was nearly burned down by angry mobs. We backed away to reconsider how to proceed.

John set out to establish a presence and let Christ be known through sharing his love with people round about. But all was done with the intent of being able to see changed lives and permanent spiritual communities being formed. Look at the pictures—they show the beautiful and effective progression that now exists in the efforts of the WCG Bangladesh, from presence to proclamation to persuasion. The spiritual communities have been and are being formed, and they are gaining in strength and spiritual health. They also remain a blessing to all those who are round about.

### **Definitions**

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**Presence Evangelism:** Letting your light shine, often through good works. Example: World Vision, Mercy Ships, Kids Alive, local outreach projects.

**Proclamation Evangelism:** Creation of situations where people are told about Jesus Christ and invited to accept him. Example: Crusades, door-to-door evangelism, musical touring evangelism, Jesus Film project.

**Persuasion Evangelism:** Establishment of relationships that lead to conversion and discipling of converts to a basic level of spiritual maturity. Example: church plants, World Impact, cell churches.

### Proclamation Gone Wrong

Ranjon Roy and his wife are part of the gospel work supported by the WCG in Bangladesh. It's a risky occupation, but Ranjon patiently establishes a presence in a village. Based on the goodwill generated at the "Presence" level, Ranjon introduces those who are open-minded to the Scriptures. As the Holy Spirit opens minds further, people are led to accept Christ as their Lord and Saviour.

Ranjon's brother was also a gospel worker, involved in strictly "Proclamation" evangelism—in this case, a Jesus Film ministry. Hridoy Roy was attacked and stabbed to death in reprisal for attempting to indoctrinate villagers away from Islam. Hridoy was hailed in a U.S. Christian newsletter as Bangladesh's first martyr. Was Hridoy a martyr, a victim of lack of wisdom... or maybe a little of both?

### Presence Evangelism

Goats arrive on the upper deck. The goat program has opened doors and hearts in the villages. Our people establish relationships with village leaders,

who help identify the poorest of the poor, who are then given a goat. One goat can, over time lift a widow from destitution. Pictured (right) are some of the latest beneficiaries of the goat program.

### Presence Evangelism

The nurses training program is the latest of the "Presence" evangelism efforts in Bangladesh. Professional training in home-care nursing is given. Pictured (above) is the second class to graduate from the training program. These young women will fan out across the countryside providing home-care for elderly and invalids. The nurses represent all faiths, but the Christian nurses have a special mission to share Christ's love with as many as possible.

### Proclamation Evangelism

Our ultimate goal is always to see people who are dead in their sins become alive in Christ. For example, many women attended a Bible study conducted at our training centre. Many of these women were reached through one of various "Presence Evangelism" programs. But their desire has gone beyond the physical to a desire to understand the Scriptures and to come to know the Christian God. Note that the vast majority of attendees are women. This is common in many mission fields. The women, however, teach the children, and eventually many husbands follow.

### Persuasion Evangelism

Cell groups are formed where new converts can be part of a growing spiritual community. After conversion and a time of discipleship, these brothers and sisters in Christ become part of the Presence and Proclamation process. In addition, each new household opens the door to relationships that are open to Persuasion Evangelism from the outset.

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# Lessons from the Bible

## The Gospel of Mark

### Lesson 2: Mark 1:1-8

### A Lesson About Transition

How would you describe the message of John the Baptist? Mark said that John preached "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins," but that his message was, "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit."

To set the context, Mark cites the words of Isaiah, combining them with a well-known prophecy from

Malachi 3:1, about the messenger whom God would send to "prepare the way for the Lord."

What is the connection between preparing the way for the Lord and repentance for the forgiveness of sins? And what does that have to do with John's message that one more powerful than he would come, one who would baptise with the Holy Spirit? Let's begin in Malachi.

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### Time to repent

The prophecy Mark quoted from Malachi warned about a coming day of judgment against unfaithful Israel and Judah. In Malachi 2:17, the prophet declared, "You have wearied the Lord with your words... by saying, 'All who do evil are good in the eyes of the Lord, and he is pleased with them' or 'Where is the God of justice?'"

The next verse, Malachi 3:1, is the one Mark used in describing the role of John the Baptist. It is the answer to the rhetorical question just posed by Israel. Here is what the God of justice is going to do.

"See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the Lord Almighty".

But, says verses 2-5, the Lord's coming will entail a powerful cleansing and purifying of his people. He will set things right and deliver the weak and disadvantaged from their cruel oppressors. "Who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap".

What can this mean, considering God's unchanging faithfulness, but a call to repentance — a call to turn back to God? God will never turn from his covenant faithfulness despite Israel's unfaithfulness, and for this reason Israel will not be destroyed (v. 6). Therefore God will, in his grace and love, save all who will turn to him (v. 7). It may have appeared for a time that there was nothing to gain by serving God and that only evildoers prosper (vs. 14-15), but that was never really the case (v. 16). God never leaves nor forsakes those who put their trust in him (vs. 16-18).

Therefore, God says, before this great and dreadful day of judgment comes, he would send them the prophet Elijah, who would bring together as one the hearts of the fathers and the children, that is, the hearts of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob united with the hearts of the generation upon which this judgment would fall.

### Transitions

In this righteous way (see Romans 3:21-22 and Matthew 3:15), through the sudden coming of the Lord to his temple in cleansing judgment and forgiving grace, preceded by the voice of preparation crying in the wilderness, God would bring together the old with the new.

The Genesis creation would find its redemption in its transition into the new creation in Jesus Christ. The old covenant would find its fulfillment in its transition into the new covenant in Jesus Christ (see Jeremiah 31:31; 2 Corinthians 3:14).

The prophets of Israel would find their climax in John the Baptist (see Matthew 11:11 and Luke 16:16) and their fulfillment in the transition to the One whose sandals John knew he was "not worthy to stoop down and untie" (Mark 1:7). And wretched sinners like you and me would find love, forgiveness and redemption in the welcoming arms of the Father as he transitions us into his new creation in Jesus Christ (see 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Romans 8:38-39).

The "beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ" (Mark 1:1), rooted in creation itself and expressing itself unceasingly throughout history in God's faithfulness to his covenant promises, finds its grand consummation in the One who "will baptise you with

### Holy Spirit" (v. 8).

In Christ, God has brought together all things in heaven and earth and reconciled them to himself in his new creation (see Colossians 1:19-20 and Ephesians 1:9-10).

That is why Paul instructed the church at Galatia, "Neither circumcision [upholding the ritual] nor uncircumcision [disregarding the ritual] means anything; what counts is a new creation" (Galatians 6:15).

### New creation

Let's be honest. It might be encouraging or even inspiring to hear that we are a new creation, but the truth is, we don't often *feel* very much like a new creation. We usually feel more like a struggling creation, a tired, worried, barely-hanging-on-by-our-fingernails creation.

Don't let that get you down. That is how things are right now, but it will not always be so. The day will come when the new creation God has already made you to be in Christ will be fully unveiled (Colossians 3:1-4). And when that happens, there will be no more crying, no more pain and no more death (Revelation 21:4).

Even now, our hope lies in this: God has proven in Christ his love for us and his faithfulness to us (consider Romans 5:6-8). He has made our cause his own. He has taken responsibility for us sins and all. He has taken us under his wing, and he will never let us go. That is why we trust him.

God, who proved himself faithful to faithless Israel, is exactly the same God who is faithful to faithless you and me. He is the same from the beginning, which means he has and always will be *for you*, working to help and to heal, and not to condemn (consider John 3:17).

If you have turned your back on God, don't ever think he has turned his back on you. Quite the contrary, He's got the porch light on and dinner on the table, waiting for you to come home.

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### For reflection:

1. How was John the Baptist related to the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ (v. 1)?
2. How did John fulfil the prophecies about preparing the way for the Lord (vs. 2-4)?
3. What is the connection between forgiveness and judgment?
4. What does John's message about a greater one to come mean for you?

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# Lessons from the Bible

## The Gospel of Mark

### Lesson 3: Mark 1:1-8

#### A Lesson About Power

Baptism is not unique to Christianity. The use of water in purification and cleansing rites is as old as recorded history, and for a devoted first-century Jew, ritual washings were a regular part of life.

Unlike ritual washings, however, baptism involved the complete bathing of the entire body, and for first-century Jews it was reserved for proselytes, or gentile converts to the Jewish faith. If a gentile became a proselyte, besides keeping the Sabbath and avoiding defiled meat, he had to undergo certain rituals. He had to be circumcised, because circumcision was the mark of the Abrahamic covenant. A sacrifice had to be made for him to make a blood atonement for his sins. And he had to be baptised as a sign of his cleansing from past pollutions and the beginning of his new, purified life as a member of the household of God.

But John was calling for Jews—already members of the covenant people—to be baptised as though they were in no better standing with God than gentiles. Indeed, John's message was a declaration that God's prophesied judgment on faithless Israel was near, and that only those who humbled themselves and turned back to God would be spared.

But for those who would turn to God, who would make their confession and undergo this watery sign of commitment to a new life before God, something even greater was in store. There lay ahead a baptism that was not merely a sign or a ritual, but the real thing—the actual cleansing of the heart and mind that would result not merely in new behaviour but in an entirely new person!

This baptism would be one that only the Son of God could provide, and he would provide it by sending the Holy Spirit to dwell both with and in the people of God.  
Power

"I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been

clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). Jesus was referring to the Holy Spirit, described in Acts 2:2 as a powerful wind and flames of fire.

It might be tempting to think about this "power" that the Holy Spirit provides as something we can use to make us stronger than others, wiser than others, braver than others, or more talented, healthier or wealthier than others. But the Holy Spirit is God, not a genie in a bottle to grant our every wish.

Indeed, God loves us dearly, cares for us tenderly and moves mountains to help us in our need. But God's priority is to make us like Jesus Christ, and Jesus left us an example of suffering for righteousness' sake (see 1 Peter 3:17-18), not of amassing fortune and fame.

#### Triune God

There is only one God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There is no Holy Spirit, therefore, except the one sent by the Father and the Son to minister their presence with you and in you for your redemption. The Holy Spirit does not draw attention to himself, but leads us to the Son who presents us to the Father (compare John 14:26; 16:13-14).

The Spirit does not have his own agenda, but only the agenda of the Father and the Son, who sent him. That agenda is human redemption and salvation—the *gospel* agenda. The Spirit is not a prima donna, a showboat, an entertainer, a circus or a sideshow. The Spirit is God, and he is God with the Father and the Son and no other way.

Our heavenly Father is the Father of Jesus Christ, the Father who loved the world so much that he sent his Son to save the world (see John 3:16-17) and who, with the Son, sent the Holy Spirit so that he and the Son would always be with us and in us (see John 14:16-19).

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That means that any other idea you have about God—about him being mad at you, for example, about him being unsure about what he is finally going to do with you, about him not listening to you or not caring about you or not loving you—is pure fiction.

The God who has revealed himself fully in Jesus Christ is the only God there is. He is the God who loves you, who sent his Son to save you and his Spirit to make you what you are in Christ. He is the God who *will not be without you*, and there is no other God but this one—Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

That means that the Holy Spirit empowers you, not for human means and ends, but for God's means and ends, which have to do with conforming you to the image of Christ, not with granting you the life-style of the rich and famous.

### **Baptism of the Spirit**

To be baptised with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8) is to be baptised into the baptism of Jesus Christ. It is to enter into new life in Christ—the life of the kingdom of God. When Jesus was baptised in water, the Holy Spirit came upon him, and when we enter into Jesus' baptism, we enter the fellowship of the Holy Spirit who ministers to all the saints the things of Christ. Our baptism in water is a sign of the baptism we receive in Jesus, which is ministered to us from the Father by the Holy Spirit.

The gifts of the Spirit, then (see 1 Corinthians 12:7-11; 27-31), whether tongues or healing or administration or teaching or whatever they might be, are for the benefit of the body of Christ, and not for personal acclaim or gain (2 Peter 4:10). They are not to enable us to stand out among people or appear to be closer to God than others. They are not to make us feel more spiritual or more saved or more righteous than others. Rather, they are to enable us to share in Christ's work of love and redemption.

The Holy Spirit lives in us, unites us with the Father and the Son and transforms us into the image of Christ. If you are looking for riches, talk to an investment counsellor. But if you are looking for hope, courage, endurance, love, mercy and help in time of need, talk to God. He'll send you the Holy Spirit.

*J. Michael Fezell*

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### **For reflection**

1. What is the meaning of baptism?
2. What is baptism with the Holy Spirit?
3. Who is the Holy Spirit?
4. What is the Holy Spirit doing in the world?
5. In the church?
6. In your life?

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## **Bible Study**

### **Everyone needs the gospel**

A study of Romans

Part 2



By Michael Morrison

As part of Paul's description of the gospel, he explains the need for it. What is it that people need to be saved from?

In Romans 1 Paul explains that people rejected God and fell into a spiral of sin, and God says that those who do that deserve death. Chapter 2 continues this theme, showing that we need to be rescued. The gospel tells us that we have gone from God's wrath to his favour—from death to glory, all thanks to Jesus Christ.

### **All are guilty**

In Romans 2:1 Paul says, "Therefore, you have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things."

Does Paul mean that if you accuse someone of murder, you have committed murder? No; we need to see the context. In Romans 1:29-31, Paul mentions a

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variety of sins: “They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless”.

In Romans 2:1, Paul is saying that whenever we pass judgment on someone else, we are guilty of the same kind of thing. We are all guilty of something in the list, so we should not judge other people. (Paul will say more about that in chapter 14.)

If we condemn someone, we are saying that sinners deserve to be punished (1:32). But since we have sinned, we also deserve to be punished. At its root, sin comes from ignoring what God says. And if we choose life without God, we are choosing death, since God is the sustainer of life. That is why Paul says: “God’s judgment against those who do such things is based on truth” (2:2). When God says they deserve death, they do.

“So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God’s judgment?” (2:3), everyone will be judged, so no one should be pointing fingers.

“Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness leads you toward repentance?” (2:4). If we judge others, we are showing contempt for God’s mercy—not only his mercy toward them, but also his mercy and patience toward us.

### Condemned by our works

In verse 5, Paul is still talking to the person who passes judgment on others: “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.” If you persist in judging, you are committing more sins, and it will be worse on you in the day of judgment. God’s wrath is righteous. If he punishes us, we are getting what we deserve.

In the judgment, God “will give to each person according to what he has done. To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honour and immortality, he will give eternal life” (vv. 6-7). If we take this out of context, it could suggest that people can be saved on the basis of good works. But Paul is explaining the need for the gospel—he is not saying that some people don’t need it. If anyone thinks that they have consistently done good, their idea of “good” isn’t good enough.

“But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile” (vv. 8-9). Even if God did choose the Jews as

a people, they are not automatically saved. If they sin, they deserve the penalties of sin.

God will give “glory, honour and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile” (v. 10). Paul is explaining the basis of judgment; he is not saying here how many people fit into each category. Later, he will say that all have sinned; no one deserves glory, honour and eternal life. Everyone needs mercy, because we will all be judged on what we have done—and we have all fallen short.

Verse 11: “God does not show favouritism.” He does not have one standard for Jews, and a different standard for Gentiles. All are condemned in the same way.

### Equal treatment under the law

“All who sin apart from the law [Paul is referring to Gentiles here] will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law [Jews] will be judged by the law” (v. 12). No matter who you are, if you sin, you will be condemned. This would be terrible news, if it weren’t for the gospel. The gospel is news we desperately need, and news that is very good—but it is especially good when we see how bad the alternative is.

Verse 13: “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.” It is not enough for people to have the law—to be declared righteous on the basis of the law, they have to keep it.

However, Paul soon says “no one will be declared righteous in [God’s] sight by observing the law” (3:20). At first glance, these two verses appear to contradict each other. However, Romans 2:13 talks about theory and Romans 3:20 talks about real life. If people did obey the law, they would be righteous, but they sometimes disobey and therefore fall short of being counted righteous on that basis. That is why everyone needs the gospel.

But how can God condemn Gentiles for breaking his law, if they don’t know what it is? Paul explains in verses 14-15: “When Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.”

Gentiles keep some things required by the law. Nature itself teaches that murder and adultery are wrong. Gentiles have a conscience, and it sometimes says they did well, and sometimes says that they did not. Even by their own law, they fall short. It is fair for God to condemn them.

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Paul gets back to his point in verse 16: "This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares." The gospel says that there will be a day of judgment, and that Jesus will be the judge (Acts 17:31). The gospel announces judgment as well as mercy.

Trouble is coming, Paul says, and there is a way to escape. It's like someone came to my door and said: "Your car is starting to roll down the hill toward the highway. But if you hurry, you can stop it." I would be thankful to hear the good news, even if some bad news came first. We cannot blame the messenger for our problem; we can only be thankful that the solution is also given to us.

### **Advantages of the Jews**

In verse 17, Paul begins to address some arguments that Jews might have: "If you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God; if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth... (vv. 17-20).

If you have these advantages, Paul is saying, "you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you

rob temples?" (vv. 21-22). Readers might object: "I don't steal and commit adultery. Why are you implying that I do?"

Verse 23: "You who brag about the law, do you dishonour God by breaking the law?" Have you ever broken the law? If so, you have dishonoured God, and you are in the same category as thieves and adulterers—the category of "sinner in need of mercy." You know what you should do, and yet you fall short.

Paul then refers to Scripture to illustrate his point: "As it is written: 'God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you'" (v. 24). Ezekiel 36:22 says that the Jews had caused God's name to be blasphemed. Jews are not immune to sin and judgment. Jews need the gospel just as much as gentiles do.

### **Questions for application:**

1. What is my attitude toward sinners?
2. Do I tend to condemn? (v. 1)
3. How well do I appreciate God's mercy toward me? (v. 4)
4. Does my conscience ever defend me? (v. 15)
5. Why is judgment part of the gospel?
6. Why is it needed? (v. 16)
7. If sin dishonours God (v. 23), what should my attitude be toward sin?

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