

# Main Street UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



## **Romans 2:1-11** **“The Kind And Impartial God”**

February 7, 2015  
(5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany)

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## **“Following Christ From City Center!”**

IIA2-2'-1': ROMANS 2:1-11  
"THE KIND AND IMPARTIAL GOD"

Conclusion From Indictment Of Gentiles (1:18-32) = All Are Sinners

2) 2:1-2 NO EXCUSE FOR JUDGERS: 3 STATEMENTS, APPEAL TO TRADITION.

Prophetic Accusation v. Morally Superior Sage, Diatribe To Teach (Deliberative)

- 1a (1) a) v.1 Direct Address: "O man", Indictment + Reason. Arrogant Also Judged, 3<sup>rd</sup> pl. to 2<sup>nd</sup> sing.  
Therefore (*dio*), you have no excuse, *O man*, //1:20, Sudden Apostrophe, Wis. Sol. 15:2 (Privilege)  
whoever you are, when you judge another; Mt. 7:1-2, Trap Sprung! Lack Omniscience, Pure Character  
Teaching Took, Put Themselves In God's Place, Contempt/ No Patience!
- b (2) for in passing judgment upon him you condemn yourself, Supportive Reason: Erode Jewish Confidence  
for you, the judge, are doing (habitually) the very same things. 1:32, Premise 2, See 1:30, 1:18-32, 2 Sam. 12:1-7  
If Not Same Actions, At Least Being Judgmental/ Hypocrisy
- Principle  
2 (3) b) v.2 Appeal To Tradition, "We Know". Principle, Appeal To Tradition, 3:19, 7:14, 8:22, 28  
Now we know that the judgment of God on those who do such things Truth: Creator Is Also Judge, Premise 1  
is in accordance with the TRUTH. //1:18, *Such things* = 1:32, List of Gentile Behavior, v.32a Death  
Clear Moral Evaluation Is Not The Same As Arrogant Condemnation

2') 2:3-4 NO ESCAPE FOR JUDGERS: 3 QUESTIONS, APPEAL TO TRADITION.

Presupposes Actions/Deeds Reveal Mind/Heart

- 3a Q1 a) vv.3-4a Direct Address: "O man", 2 Indictments (?). vv.3-4// Wis. Sol. 15:1-3, No Privilege  
Now do you suppose, *O man*, Thesis, Incredulous Question // v.1  
b that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, v.4a = No Rush To Angry Judgment  
c you will escape the (righteous) judgment of God? (No!) //Mt. 3:7-10  
Ps. Sol. 15:1, 8, "Those who act lawlessly shall not escape the Lord's judgment."
- 4a Q2 Or do you presume upon (despise) Show Contempt, All On Level Ground, Jewish Views Of God's Attributes  
the riches of his kindness-and-forbearance-and-patience? Kind Delay, 2 Macc. 6:14, Wis. 15:1, 3 //Attributes  
We Should Show Kindness/Forbearance/Patience To Others
- b Q3 b) v.4b Appeal To Tradition: "Do You Not Know?" //Wis. Sol. 11:23 15:1-3, 16:9-11  
Do you not know that God's kindness is meant (seeking) to lead you to *repentance*? Is. 2:7, Jer. 3:12-14, 22  
Questions (vv.3-4a) Answered (vv.5-11), Need An About-Face  
According To Revealing Works, Not Religious Heritage  
God's Patience As Strength, 2 Bar. 21:20, Wis. Sol. 11:23, Test. Ab. 10:18, Sir. 5:4-7

1') 2:5-11 THE WRATH OF GOD AGAINST ALL WICKEDNESS (Prov. 24:12, Ps. 62:12 LXX).  
2:5-11//1:18-32 Larger Chiasm, 2 Ways

- 5 a. vv.5-6 Thesis: Judged According Deeds, Scripture (Prov. 24:12). Indicted, Actions Reveal Being  
But by your hard-and-impenitent-heart you are storing up **wrath** for yourself 1:21, 24; 9:17-18, Accumulated Judgment  
on the day of **wrath** when God's righteous judgment will be revealed, //1:18, Ps. 110, Zeph. 1:15, 18, 2:2-3, Rev. 6:17
- 6 who **'will render to every man according to his works (deeds)'**: Ps. 62:12 (LXX), 2 Cor. 5:10, God Is Just, Reason: For  
Sir. 35:13, Ps. 62:12, Prov. 24:12, Jer. 25:14, Lam. 3:64, Mt. 16:27
- 7a 1 b. v.7 Good End: Seek Glory-Honor-Immortality. Jewish Two-Ways Teaching  
to those who by perseverance in well (*agathos*) doing/ Aimed At Kingdom, Seeking Is Not The Same As Meriting  
b 2 seek for glory-and-honor-and-immortality/ Highly Valued By Romans, 3 Virtues Only God Can Grant  
c he will give eternal life; Dan. 12:2, lit. *life of the (new) age*, Resurrection, New Heavens & Earth  
Anti-God Mindset: Ambitious Self-Seeking, Suppress Truth, Obey Evil
- 8a 3 c. vv.8-9 Bad End: Wrath And Fury, Tribulation And Distress. 3 Vices  
but for those who are self seeking and do not obey the TRUTH but obey wickedness, 1:18ff., 3 Vices  
b 4 there will be" **wrath** and fury." Ex. 32:12, "Dt. 29:28, Ps. 2:5, Jer. 21:5, Sir. 48:10"  
9a 4' There will be "tribulation and distress" 8:35, "Dt. 28:53-57, Is. 8:22"  
b 3' for every human being who does evil, 3 Vices (//v.8a) Reduced To One Trajectory: Evil (v.9b)  
c the Jew first and also the Greek, 1:16, Shock! Privileged Go First!, Impartial To All Persons!  
Prov. 14:12, Amos 3:2, Pauline Description Of Ultimate Fate
- 10a 2' b' vv.10a-b Good End: Given Glory-Honor-Peace. *Those who// everyone*, Ends On A Positive Note  
but glory-and-honor-and-peace/ //v.7a, Peace As Climax, Give What Seek & More! 3 Virtues/ Variation  
b 1' to everyone who does good (*agathos*)/ If God Judges All On Works, God Is Impartial: Two Principles  
Active Trust (Inward Faith) Leads To New Attitudes, Outward Actions

- c a' vv.10c-11 All Judged Impartially, Scripture (Dt. 10:17-18). "For the Lord your God... is not partial"  
the Jew first and also the Greek. Grace May Lead To Trust Which Shows Itself In New Life/Good Works: Change!  
11 **"For God shows no partiality (favoritism)."** Lev. 19:15, Social, Ethnic, And Religious Identity Are Not A Factor  
How Did God's Kindness Change Me? Did It Show? Dt. 10:17-18, Sir. 35:12-16, Wis. 6:7  
Test. Job 4:7, 43:13; 2 Bar. 44:4, God's Final Fairness, God's Character, Reason: For Level Playing Field Before God,  
Not Ethnic History But Continuity Of Grace-Repentance-Faith-New Desires-New Life-Good Works  
Justified By Grace Through Faith (Invisible Inward Trust), Evaluated At Judgment On Visible Outward Deeds As Evidence

**A Brief Treatment Of IIA1: Romans 2:1-11**

The larger section into which 2:1-11 falls is IIA (1:18-2:11). The larger section is a 4:2 concentric pattern (1. 1:18-32, **2. 2:1-2 // 2' 2:3-4**, 1' 2:5-11). The central components (2//2') are in parallel, each with three parts: 1) direct address (*O man*, v.1a // *O man*, v.3a), 2) a reason (*For*, v.1c) or an alternative (*Or*, v.4), 3) an appeal to tradition (*Now we know*, v.2a // *Do you not know*, v.4b). The genre is a diatribe, a dialog with an imaginary partner; the purpose is variety in teaching style. The three statements of vv.1-2 (vv.1a, 1b, 2) are parallel to the three questions in vv.3-4 (vv.3, 4a, 4b). The center of the section consists of two thought units (2//2c') in parallel, the question being: are the units that precede (1:1-18) and follow (2:5-11) also in a mirror relationship? My answer is Yes because of repeated key vocabulary and the common theme of the revelation of God's resistance to evil, now and later. Four terms that open 1:18-32 (v.18: *wrath, revealed, wickedness, truth*) are echoed in 2:5-8 (*wrath [3x], revealed, truth, wickedness*). Other inclusions are *heart* (1:21//2:5), *glory* (1:23//2:10), and *evil* (1:29 [2x]//2:9). The contrast is between the continuing revelation of God's wrath in history (1:18-32) and at its climax (2:5-11). Some take 1:1-18 and 2:1-11(16) as separate units or sections, but this analysis indicates Paul composed 1:18-2:11 as a unified mini-essay of four paragraphs in a concentric pattern. No one is excluded from God's truth.

The particle *Dio* (*Therefore*, v.18) is inferential; it links what follows to what came before. In terms of genre, Paul shifts from prophetic indictment (1:18-32) to a diatribe (imaginary dialog), including direct address (*O man*) and rhetorical questions. It is as if— in a lecture to the public— Paul turned and called out an individual to dramatic effect (an *apostrophe*). It is not only those who practice idolatry and engage in vice who are *without excuse* (1:20), it is anyone who assents to Paul's diagnosis of the Gentile world as if they were not already a participant (v.1). There is no perch of superiority for the Gentile moralist. *To judge* in the sense of *to condemn* is God's prerogative alone (Mt. 7:1-2). Not just the overtly wicked are guilty but also the arrogant. No one is an outside observer when it comes to the engulfing powers of sin and evil as judged by God now and later. As regards argument, an indictment (v.1a) is followed by a reason using a double *For* (vv.1b,c) and bolstered with an appeal to common teaching (v.2, *We know*). Paul is not saying all sin the same way but that all shows signs of the same moral disease, even those who applaud Paul's diagnosis (1:1-18). So, having included all in the circle of sin and judgment, Paul now asks three rapid questions: 1) Does our straw man assume he will escape God's true verdict (v.3)? Probably before, but not now! 2) Does he not understand that postponed judgment is a sign of divine *kindness and forbearance and patience* (v.4a)? 3) Just as the assertion and reason of v.1 were a pair, so the questions *Now do you suppose?* and *Do you presume?* are a pair and supported by a second appeal to common teaching, "Do you not know that God's kindness is seeking to lead you to repentance" (v.4b)? Our guilty interlocutor is stripped of superiority, faced with wrath, and called to repentance!

With the final paragraph of the larger section (2:5-11) we return to the themes of 1:18-32 noted above. The structure is a 5:1 chiasm (a-b-**c**-b'-a') with the full weight of God's condemnation (*wrath and fury... tribulation and distress*) at the center (c.vv.8-9). On either side (b. v.7//b' v.10a,b) is the promised gift of eternal life. If the reception of God's grace does not lead to a deep hunger for holiness and transformation, there is a disconnect. A series of three noble aspirations in v.7b (*glory, honor, immortality*) are parallel to three in v.10a (*glory, honor, peace*). This is in contrast to three ignoble characteristics at the center (v.8a, *selfish ambition, disobey truth, obey wickedness*). Life has one of two trajectories. A hard, rebellious heart means judgment is piling up with interest (v.5), and since God will repay all for their deeds (v.6, Ps. 62:12) and do it impartially (v.11, Dt. 10:17-18), is it not wise for all to turn to God now? The whole world (*every man* [v.6] // *Jew and Greek* [vv.9c, 10c]) stands guilty and in need of saving.

# THE GOD WHO IS NOT IMPRESSED

*“Do you not know that the kindness of God is seeking to lead you to repentance?”*

R O M A N S 2 : 4 b

Every good thing in life is a call to turn and face the Giver.

I had one of those moments this week. I think it was in prayer, but it could just as easily have been *holy daydreaming*. It seems the Lord above is quite impressed with our technology and thinks its use by cadres of good angels might be effective to control things down at ground level. So, I am proud to announce that as of midnight, new measures are in place. Enforcer Angels will now use Tasers like the police. The prayer of the University of Florida student Andrew Meyer, “Don’t Tase Me, Bro,” will no longer be answered.<sup>1</sup> You have twelve hours to prepare.

As you know, a Taser shoots a high-voltage current into the body through a needle over a thin wire at close range. A half-second causes intense pain and muscle contractions. Two to three seconds and you become dazed and crumple. Anything longer drops a person for up to fifteen minutes as their electrical system recovers. Tasers have a 95 percent compliance rate. So here is the new angelic protocol:

“Start to lie, even a little, and you are immediately hit with a half-second zap. Try to steal? Two seconds of attention-getting shock. A would-be murderer is totally incapacitated. Since evil thoughts may lead to bad actions, you get a charge for bad thinking. And, since it's evil to fail to do good when you can, there’s a jolt for failing to show mercy, kindness and justice. The protocols are consistent: people are zapped for evil acts, evil thoughts, even failing to do what’s right.” And what is the result of the new regime? Christian philosopher J.P. Moreland says it’s “a world of twitchy people who obey God like cowering, beaten dogs.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/dont-tase-me-bro>.

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from J. P. Moreland, Tim Muehlhoff, *The God Conversation* (Downer’s Grove, ILL: IVP, 2007), 26.

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**Romans 2:1-11. . . . . 5**

And that is not what God is after. Not cowering dogs but real characters, partners who freely respond in love and grow in wisdom and carry out God’s mission because they’ve been brought home through Jesus Christ and found new life in the midst of an old world. Our being made in God’s image as male and female is a layered reality, but at a minimum it includes a capacity for relationship with God and one another, and also a principle of self-determination, meaning that our choices have consequences for us and others. We choose; and though we may wish to escape, we cannot. Not to decide is to decide not to have a vote in the issues that affect me. And when we can no longer decide, others decide for us through the courts. We live in an interactive web of choice and action and consequence; in other words a moral universe, a university of human formation. Only at death do we stop choosing, and then God makes a choice about us which is why Paul issues a warning to those who resist God’s kindness and do not turn to face the God who wants their full attention:

“Do you not know that God’s kindness is seeking to lead you to *repentance*?” to a whole-life turn around. Then a warning, “But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed, who”– and here Paul quotes from Proverbs and Deuteronomy– “will render to every person according to their deeds.... For God shows no partiality.”

The God who has ultimate freedom and can do whatever can be done,<sup>3</sup> has given us his image bearers a limited measure of the same capacity, and though it has been twisted out of shape by the great rebellion which brought sin and evil and death into the good creation, the gift is still with us, and through God’s help can become responsive again.<sup>4</sup> Persons dead to God can be made alive again; a will opposed to God can be drawn back into cooperation; a new world can open up right where you are. A lost relationship with God can be restored with all sorts of wonderful effects.

We all know intuitively that what I do impacts you, and what you do effects me. We also know God does not make it a constant habit to interrupt that web of

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<sup>3</sup> The theological name for this attribute is *omni-potence*, which when linked with other *omni* attributes (all knowing: *omniscience*, everywhere presence: *omni-presence*, all good: *omni-benevolence*) fills out the picture of God’s unique person.

<sup>4</sup> On the logic and workings of prevenient grace in Arminian theology, see Don Thorsen, *Calvin vs. Wesley: Bringing Belief In Line With Practice* (Nashville, TN: Abington, 2013), Chapter 4, “Grace: More Prevenient Than Irresistible,” 44-57.

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**Romans 2:1-11. . . . . 6**

human choices and outcomes through jolts of electricity or through a constant flow of interrupting miracles to stave off consequences, though there is both wrath now in this world<sup>5</sup> and all sorts of divine surprises. The painful awareness of conscience is a jolt of sorts– it is for me!– and the presence of credible miracles reminds us how active God is in world,<sup>6</sup> and yet– desire them as we may and seek the as we might– miracles are not under our control. We live in an open system with an interactive God who is shining the light of love and truth on every soul and calling for a response of trust leading to a new way of life driven by the Holy Spirit within. We are dynamically related to the Triune God now– even if we don’t know it or resist it, but God also honors the consequences of our choices, our biggest being either a Yes or No to the call to a new life with Jesus and his people. God will woo you and offer evidence of his dynamic presence and call all your days, but you can still close your eyes and walk into the shadows and then into the darkness. And if that is the orientation of your life as a whole, if that is the trajectory of your soul as revealed in the deeds you enacted, then at the day of judgment verse 8 and 9 will be fulfilled:

“... but for those who are self-seeking (and not God seeking) and do not obey the truth but obey wickedness (a life of anti-God choices), there will be ‘wrath and fury.’ There will be ‘tribulation and distress’ for every human being who does evil,” and to make sure all are included, Paul names the two great tribes of his day, “the Jew first and also the Greek.” None are exempt, and the standards are the same for all because God is the only being who is fully impartial. ‘What did you do with life? How did you respond to my call? Did we have a relationship?’”

*Wrath and fury, tribulation and distress* are synonyms from the Old Testament regarding the day of God’s judgment, each highlighting an aspect of one reality, and none of them are good. *Wrath* is God’s push-back against all you have become as a distortion of his intent; it is a *fury* and storm from which there is no escape; it is the

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<sup>5</sup> Romans 1:18 teaches that God’s wrath is even now being revealed against all sorts of wickedness. Divine wrath is God’s active resistance to all that corrupts the good creation. The United Methodist Confession of Faith, Article XII: The Judgment and the Future State, reads, “We believe all men stand under the righteous judgment of Jesus Christ, *both now* and in the last day. We believe in the resurrection of the dead; the righteous to life eternal and the wicked to endless condemnation” (*BOD 2012*: 74).

<sup>6</sup> See the magisterial study of Craig Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts: Two Volumes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011).

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**Romans 2:1-11. . . . . 7**

*tribulation* of being put under extreme pressure that exposes every crack in your character, and it is the *distress* of there being nowhere to turn. Paul could not have used more sobering language, making clear it is a future to be avoided. In fact, all the vivid images of judgment in the New Testament and all that Jesus said about the hell of being forever separated from God and all goodness are meant to have an emotional effect of revulsion, that we would imagine ourselves in such a horrible state and that it would *shock us*— there’s the image again!— into awareness.<sup>7</sup>

It is surprising for many middle-of-the-roaders to find that our United Methodist Church, for all our recent neglect of our own doctrines, still retains the tough edge of this truth in our official doctrinal statements as a reminder that classic Christianity, the consensus of the church across the ages, is that all will face the great truth-telling and that there are only two outcomes. It sobers me to read these words from our Confession of Faith because they are so uncompromisingly final: “*We believe* all men (and women) stand under the righteous judgment of Jesus Christ, both now and in the last day.” That is the current reality; Jesus is calling you to follow him and well aware of the consequences, now and later, if you don’t.

Then comes a second statement of what the church confesses on the basis of Scripture, and here it moves from the present day to the last day, the same event Paul describes in verses 5 through 11: “*We believe* in the resurrection of the dead; the righteous to life eternal and the wicked to endless condemnation.”

When the long grind of history as we have known it comes to a sudden halt, when the kingdom of God sheds invisibility for visibility, when the dead are raised, the books opened and the truth told, there are only two options and no neutral ground. Our doctrinal statement does not have a lot of details; what it has is the clarity to assert that God’s true verdict endures, either *eternal life in the kingdom of God where Jesus rules and all share resurrection bodies able to endure God’s holy joys* or else *endless condemnation*. This is not a preacher’s threat to control you with fear. I have no desire to control you; I have all I can handle trying to control myself! This is the hard edge of the church’s faith in a God just and wise enough to finally set things right and heal creation, with me or without me. I am welcomed into the kingdom of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but I am not necessary to its arrival or completion.

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<sup>7</sup> See Jerry L. Walls, *Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2015), Chapter 3, “If God is Love, Why is There a Hell?” 67-90; also his earlier *Hell: The Logic Of Damnation* (Oxford, England, OUP, 1992).

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**Romans 2:1-11. . . . . 8**

There are all sorts people who rebel intellectually and emotionally against the idea of a great truth-telling and the division of all human beings into two– and only two– camps: the saved and the lost, the blessed and the damned. “It’s just so final,” they say, “Isn’t there some third more tolerant option for those of us who are not *quite-so-bad* as the others? Maybe a soft version of reincarnation for a do-over?” No, not without turning this faith into something it never has been, except in more recent days, the reason being that your one life is not a joke or a trial run but a very serious affair with ultimate consequences. You are imprinted at conception with the dignity of the image of God and designed to be God’s ambassador for good at ground level, and not to do so is high treason. For those who reject the idea of a great truth-telling and a final separation, N.T. Wright offers this perspective:

“The biblical doctrine of God's wrath is rooted in the doctrine of God as the good, wise and loving creator, who hates– yes, hates, and hates implacably– anything that spoils, defaces, distorts, or damages his beautiful creation, and in particular anything that does that to his image-bearing creatures. If God does not hate racial prejudice, he is neither good nor loving. If God is not wrathful at child abuse, he is neither good nor loving. If God is not utterly determined to root out from his creation, in an act of proper wrath and judgment, the arrogance that allows people to exploit, bomb, bully and enslave one another, he is neither loving, nor good, nor wise.”<sup>8</sup>

Jesus taught that life as we know it on planet earth will be interrupted by the sudden intrusion of the kingdom of God,<sup>9</sup> but until then the world is as it now is, full of sin and evil and ignorance and death and rebellion and horrific consequences as we interact with one another in destructive ways. Yet the world is still upheld and sustained by God’s providence; the sun rises; the universe continues to expand; seasons come and go; food is grown; people are born and die; empires rise and fall; goodness shines through the crud as a reminder of an Eden lost and longed for, but the pain of our common rebellion is everywhere for all to see. We are all in this grand experiment together, and at the judgment God shows us the truth of who we are, the inner meaning of what happened along the way, and what we have become by either resisting or cooperating with his grace and kindness and patience.

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<sup>8</sup> PreachingToday.com search under Romans 2:1-11.

<sup>9</sup> e.g. Matthew 25:31-46.

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**Romans 2:1-11. . . . . 9**

This question is, Did my trust in Jesus Christ and the new relationship it opened with the Father and the Spirit make a difference in the way I lived? Did the inner reality of faith grow and mature into a life of good works in cooperation with the Holy Spirit? Not an effort to please God by frantic charity or empty schemes of endless self-improvement- as if I could ever get it right on my own, but a deep and ongoing partnership in which God leads and I follow into the good works God lays out before me a day at a time.<sup>10</sup> Not works to impress God, because that never works since God can never be put in our debt, but deeds as evidence of a new and living internal reality full of lively possibilities. When I go with the flow of God’s vision for my life, and when I quickly turn away from every resistance when it is revealed, it is a new life with all sorts of good and worthy efforts.

What I am counting on is nothing on my side of the ledger because I have no bargaining chips; what I am counting on is the mercy and love of God revealed in the whole life of Jesus the Son as brought to a climax in his sacrificial death and glorious bodily resurrection for me and for you and for all.

At the judgment, when I stand before the impartial God who is not impressed with things that impress us, I will finally know the meaning of my life, and so will you. And for the Christian who lives– as Paul said– with the hopes of *glory and honor and immortality*, all of which are desires that come from the Holy Spirit, the truth-telling is for two reasons. First, that we might see with God his hidden work across all our days; and secondly, that we might see the full effects of the good works that flowed from our faith and how God used them in ways that went beyond our knowing. We are not yet ready for heaven, and after that the kingdom of God, until we know the full truth, which only God can tell us. We’ve already been accepted into the family by simple trust in who Jesus is and what he’s done, and now our history as a whole– from conception to death– undergoes a thorough exposure and purging light and truth and love of the same Jesus Christ we already know.<sup>11</sup> And if I am to face such a through examination, and if I am kept aware of my sins and frailties in

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<sup>10</sup> Ephesians 2:8-10, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God– not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, *created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*”

<sup>11</sup> On purgation, but not purgatory, as a Protestant possibility, see Jerry L. Walls, *Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2015), Chapter 4, “If We Are Saved By Grace, Why Do We Need Purgatory,” 91-116. For a text, 1 Cor. 3:5-17.

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**Romans 2:1-11. . . . . 10**

this life, then why should I ever have the idea I am competent to pronounce judgment on any other human being? This is why Paul is so sarcastic in verses 1 through 4. Not that we give up making moral diagnoses according to Scripture, but that we forever forfeit the judge’s seat. The doctor who gives you an accurate diagnosis, even if severe and calling for drastic therapies, is not a judge of your worth but a friend of your health. I think Paul would find what Pastor Tim Keller writes to his liking:

“When a Christian sees prostitutes, alcoholics, prisoners, drug addicts, unwed mothers, the homeless, refugees, he knows he is looking in a mirror. Perhaps the Christian spent all of his life as a respectable middle-class person. No matter. He thinks, ‘Spiritually I was just like these people, though physically and socially I never was where they are now. They are outcasts. (Spiritually speaking) I was an outcast.’”<sup>12</sup>

I recently had a conversation with a young woman who had something unpleasant happen when she was about ten. Now that she is older and thinking about such things, she has doubts about God’s love or God’s power or both. “Why did God not protect me?” It’s a good question. And when, after listening to get the story and its feelings, I responded that life on earth as we know it is no longer a Disney Land but a cosmic battlefield with real casualties, it didn’t quite connect. When I commented that her privileged life had rightly kept her in a protective bubble and away from much of life’s harshness, she didn’t like it, but knew it was true. But when I asked her to consider the thought experiment of what it would mean for God to interrupt her freedom with small and larger jolts of electricity, light dawned. She’s been hurt and was raising good questions, but she also values the idea that her freedom is a gift from the Creator, and that to always be interrupting the linkage between actions and consequences makes it a joke. And if she enjoys such, then so does the one who hurt her, and our God is able to heal and set things right.

Deron Smith is a pastor in Springfield, Missouri. He, his wife, and three daughters— ages 6, 8, and 11— were at the table discussing the tradition of Lent as forty days to prepare for the joy of Jesus’ resurrection at Easter.

"Lent is a time to do what the Bible calls *repent*," said their father. "This means we walk toward God, not away from him, and we say we’re sorry for the things we do that are not right." The girls' eyes were locked on, so he continued, "Some

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<sup>12</sup> Tim Keller, *Ministries of Mercy* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2007), 60.

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**Romans 2:1-11. . . . . 11**

people like to show they are thinking about what Jesus gave up for us by giving up something they think has become too important to them, like their computers or coffee or dessert or meat or television. It doesn't make God love us more; it just makes us more open to God and less cluttered with our own junk."

The oldest chimed in, "I'll give up sweets."

"Me, too," said daughter number two.

The youngest pondered in silence. She then nodded at her thoughtful conclusion, "I want to give up consequences!"<sup>13</sup>

My read of God's intention is that we are not robots programmed to always do the right thing, nor are we evolved lab rats controlled by an aversion to shock. Even in our current fallen state, our choices and life patterns matter; and we all know it. My life is not an illusion or joke but a serious affair. God created human icons of the divine image in two complementary models— male and female— with gifts of thinking and rationality, a range of emotions, limited but real freedom, the power to create future image-bearing generations through our bodies, and a call to develop creation into complex cultures. To make that work we are set in a world with consequences. Actions have outcomes, and in the end we go before an audience of One. So when someone asks me how they arrived in the mess they're in, I remind them of the chain of consequences, "Sow a thought, reap an action; so an action, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny." The thought that maybe I ought to take Jesus seriously is an opening to a new destiny. Mercy is nearby.

In a sense I've gone beyond Paul today since there is no explicit mention of Jesus Christ in the passage before us, and only a hint of eternal life. He is not yet ready to present the cure for what ails us, only at this point that none of us is qualified to sit in judgment on another as if we had the final say, and that all of us will face the impartial God and find ourselves in one of two realities. He does not rush to the cure because he wants us to feel the full weight of the problem we all face. Every day we are either becoming more of the kind of person who would be at home with God or the kind of person who would find that to be utter misery.

One way to respond to this message is to take a minute of silence, then take out your bulletin and join me in a prayer I wrote for me and decided to share with you, "O Lord, so keep me in your light of truth, that I will gladly offer to others the mercy I so need for myself. Amen."

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<sup>13</sup> PreachingToday.com search under Romans 2:1-11.

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**UNITED METHODIST TEACHING ABOUT THE ONE AND TRIUNE GOD**

**The Articles of Religion: Article 1, Of Faith in the Holy Trinity**

“There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body or parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the maker and preserver of all things, both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there are three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity- the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.”<sup>14</sup>

This article offers eleven attributes or perfections of God grounded in Scripture. They are:

- 1) God’s simple unity: God is one;
- 2) God’s vitality: God is supremely alive and the origin of all life;
- 3) God’s veracity: God is utterly truthful;
- 4) God’s eternity: the everlasting God is without beginning or end;
- 5) God’s incorporeality: God is without a body and thus beyond gender;
- 6) God’s indivisibility: God cannot be divided into pieces or is separable;
- 7) God’s omnipotence: the Almighty has all power necessary to accomplish the divine will;
- 8) God’s omniscience: God is supremely wise, knowing what may be known;
- 9) God’s omni-benevolence: God’s person and work surpass human concepts of goodness;
- 10) God’s creativity: God is the maker of all things, not only the visible, but what is beyond sight, the invisible and angelic realms;
- 11) God’s preservation: God upholds and sustains creation.

**The Confession of Faith: Article 1- God**

“We believe in the one true, holy and living God, Eternal Spirit, who is Creator, Sovereign and Preserver of all things visible and invisible. He is infinite in power, wisdom, justice, goodness and love, and rules with gracious regard for the well-being and salvation of men, to the glory of his name. We believe the one God reveals himself as the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, distinct but inseparable, eternally one in essence and power.”

This article adds seven additional attributes:

- 12) God’s holiness: God is other than creation and without sin or evil;
- 13) God’s form of life: God is eternal Spirit and not matter as we know it;
- 14) God’s sovereignty: God rules actively over all;
- 15) God’s righteousness: God is just and justified in all divine actions;
- 16) God’s love: God is concerned for our welfare and acts to that end at high cost;
- 17) God’s graciousness: God rules with kind regard for the well-being and salvation of all persons;
- 18) God’s jealousy: The glorification of God in worship and life is the purpose of every creature and the path to life.

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<sup>14</sup> BOD 2012: 63-64, 70.

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