

STUDY GUIDE 3 – ‘Dodging the issue’

Read **Romans 2:1-24** (or 3:8 if time allows) in the dramatised script and/or in another version.

(1) What is the difference between human and divine judgment? (2:1-2)	
(2) What is the problem for someone who judges other people? (3)	
(3) How does God treat people who show contempt for him? (4)	
(4) What happens to a person who doesn't repent? (5-6)	
(5) What kind of people are rewarded with eternal life? (7)	
(6) What kind of people come under God's wrath? (8)	
(7) In what way is God's judgment absolutely just and fair? (9-11)	
(8) What is the importance of conscience? (12-16)	
(9) How can a religious teacher also be a total hypocrite? (17-24)	
(10) How does Paul redefine who is really a Jew? How does this apply to Christians? (28-29)	
(11) Read Jesus' parable of 'The Pharisee and the Tax-collector' (Lk 18:9-14). This is about hypocrisy and honesty as God sees them. Put down for each man: (1) why he is in the Temple (2) what he thinks about himself (3) what God thinks of him (4) why Jesus told the parable and how this is relevant to Paul's argument.	
	PHARISEE
	TAX-COLLECTOR
1	
2	
3	
4	

(A) Read the dialogue overleaf. How do Hugh and Abdul relate to their own consciences? Is it possible to drown out the voice of conscience? What happens if we do?	
(B) 'God judges everyone's secrets' (2:16). Paul seems to swing between describing God as wrathful, judgmental and punitive on the one hand, and kind, patient and tolerant on the other. Where does the truth lie?	
(C) Read vv2, 6, 11, 16 as a sequence. Paul is saying that God is able to judge justly because he knows everything about us. Trace this theme through the Bible (in smaller groups or pairs): Gen 3:8-9; 1 Sam 16:7; Eccl 12:14; Jer 23:24; 1 Cor 4:4-5; Heb 4:12-13.	
(D) Are Christians, Jews and Muslims equally guilty of hypocrisy?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there one point from this passage that puts its finger on something lacking in my own life? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there one practical step I could take as a result of studying this section of Romans? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there anything in this section which I could turn into praise or prayer to God? 	

'TWO MEN' by Mark Greenstock

(adapted from Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the Tax-Collector, Luke 18:9-14)

Narrator; Hugh (Lay Minister); Abdul (Terrorist); Hugh's Conscience; Abdul's Conscience

- NARR Two men stepped into a city church to pray,
- HUGH One a Church of England lay minister,
- ABDUL And the other an Al Qaeda terrorist.
- H CON I hope some of your church members are here to see you praying in your lunch hour.
- A CON I can't believe you would dare enter a place of worship after what you've done.
- NARR The lay minister went into the choir stalls and prayed:
- HUGH O God, I am profoundly grateful that I don't follow a squalid lifestyle like some I could mention. I happen to know for a fact that that guy fiddles his tax returns, that one beats his wife and that well-dressed lady is having it off with her dentist.
- H CON Still, in your sermon last week you gave the impression that you were on the board of sixteen charities – and you aren't.
- HUGH No, but if it shames people into giving more of their money and time, that justifies the occasional economy with the truth.
- H CON You also advocated giving up alcohol for Lent, then next day you had to hide that half-empty whisky bottle from the cleaning lady.
- HUGH Naturally I didn't want to put temptation in her way. Now who's that who just come in? He looks as if he's ripe for an act of Islamic jihad. I wonder where he's got his bomb factory? God help us!
- NARR But the terrorist went and sat in a corner pew with his head in his hands. He couldn't bear to look at the stained glass windows or at the ordinary people walking about or praying.
- ABDUL I used to have high ideals once. Now look at me.
- A CON You're a murderer. Hundreds of people have been killed or maimed thanks to you.
- HUGH I think I've prayed for long enough. I shall rise from my knees and bow gracefully to anybody I recognise.
- H CON Well done. Jesus needs more people like you in the kingdom of heaven.
- NARR The lay minister made his way out of the church. It was raining, and he had left his umbrella in the choir stall.
- HUGH Damn! I'm not going back for it – too undignified – I'll collect it on Sunday.
- ABDUL O God, I used to believe in you. If you still exist, please listen. I want to bury the past and start again. Jesus is your prophet and he forgave that terrorist on the cross next to him. Please forgive me, and grant me strength to live the way I know I should live.
- A CON Yesss!!
- NARR He stumbled back into the street. The sun came out from behind an angry cloud. He said a simple 'thank You.'
- NARR In heaven a four-million strong angelic choir erupted into the first notes of the Hallelujah Chorus, in Arabic.

RIGHT THROUGH ROMANS

'Dodging the issue' (2:1-3:8)

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So far, in 1:18-32 Paul has been levelling a general accusation against the whole human race and its attitude to God ever since the Fall. In the present section he focusses his spotlight on religious pride. It may be (2:1-16) the attitude that says 'Other people may have to be judged but the quality of my life exempts me from that,' or it may be (2:17-3:8) the specifically Jewish tendency to say 'I'm a member of God's chosen club so it doesn't matter if I break the rules.' The one is moral hypocrisy (thinking you are better than you are), the other is religious complacency (assuming you're an insider just because you wear the right badge). If this applied then to Jews, it may equally well apply now to Christians or members of any organised religion. If we thought we had escaped the storm in ch 1, there's a worse one coming in ch 2....

2:1-11 God's standards of judgment (a). **1** *You who pass judgment.* We are like a person standing on a molehill who says to someone beside them on the grass 'I'm higher than you.' But to a third person on the hillside above they appear on the same level. **2** *Based on truth.* God knows all the facts about us, including our secrets (v16); he therefore judges fairly and impartially – he has no favourites (v11). **4** *Riches.* God's generosity is seen in (a) the abundance of creation (b) special providence (c) his mercy to our failings (d) sending Jesus to die for us. This is intended not to make us complacent, but to draw us back to himself. **7** *Persistence in doing good.* Not a few acts of kindness but a life of consistent love, unselfishness and integrity. This is theoretically possible for anyone on earth, but has in historical fact been achieved only by Jesus Christ. **8** *Reject the truth.* 'It's only what Paul thinks.' We all pick and choose from God's word to suit our own preconceptions, particularly in the matter of God's judgment. **11** *Favouritism.* Even the Jews are not chosen because they are special in any way (Dt 7:7, 9:6) but to bring God's blessing to the world (Gen 12:3). God deals with his 'favourites' (e.g. Abraham, Moses, David, Daniel, Jesus) the same as with anyone else (Paul calls this 'the kindness and sternness of God,' Rom 11:22, which we see in the OT and NT alike). Simon Peter realised this truth when he met the Roman centurion Cornelius and his friends, who were Gentile seekers after truth (Acts 10:34-35).

2:12-16 The way conscience works (b). **12** *Perish.* The sequence of sin – judgment – death applies to everyone, whether they know the Ten Commandments or not. **14** *A law for themselves.* We all try to excuse our lifestyle, but we have an independent judge within ourselves, which is our *conscience* (see Glossary). This operates whether we are religiously brought up or not.

2:17-24 Questions for religious people (b). **21** *You who teach others.* In order to point up the moral failure of even the most high-principled person, Paul chooses the example of a trained Jewish rabbi (which he was himself). An equivalent today might be the head of a theological college or a bishop. Do you practise what you preach? **23** *Do you commit adultery?* In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus teaches that God's standards apply to thoughts and words as much as to actions (look up Mt 5:21-22, 27-28).

2:25-29 The meaning of circumcision (c). For *circumcision* see Glossary. Paul is distinguishing between an external sign or 'badge' of membership of God's chosen people, and the inner obedience of heart and character which that membership really requires. Controversies about circumcision today (e.g. ritual male or female circumcision) have no bearing on Paul's argument.

3:1-8 God's right to judge everybody (c). This is a digression from Paul's argument, to answer two objections he has probably met from opponents: (i) 'so what's the point of being Jewish?' (ii) 'so why is God angry, if my sin glorifies him?' In answer Paul points to two central principles: (i) God's faithfulness to his promise and (ii) God's right to judge evil and his intention to do so. He is relentlessly moving towards his climactic 'moment of truth', which we shall meet next week, that absolutely everyone is going to come under the just and fair judgment of God, and no-one will have a word to say in their defence. Thus God himself must provide, and has provided in Christ, the way out of this impasse.