

God's Judgment is Just

Lesson Text: Romans 2:1-16 Devotional Reading: Psalm 50:1-15 Background Scripture: Romans 2:1-16.

Time: A.D. 56 **Place:** from Corinth

Romans 2:1-16

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. ² Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. ³ So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? ⁴ Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

⁵ 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. ⁶ God "will repay each person according to what they have done." ⁷ To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. ⁸ But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. ⁹ There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; ¹⁰ but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ¹¹ For God does not show favoritism.

¹² All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. 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. ¹⁴ (Indeed, 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. ¹⁵ They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.) ¹⁶ This will take place on the day when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

Today's Aim

After this lesson, a student should be able to:

- Contrast the perfect judgment of God with the faulty judgment of people.
- Explain why something better than "justice" is needed.
- Express a commitment to live with a non-judgmental attitude toward others, keeping in mind the coming judgment of God.

Introduction

How different is the subject of judging when human beings are doing it! Our Scripture today, along with others, carries strong warnings against judging. No one is immune to imperfect attitudes or behavior in this area. We are not to exhibit superiority over others, or suggest that we are without flaws, or claim that we "would never be caught dead" doing what has ensnared another (especially if we have engaged in the same behavior).

Beside the many prohibitions against improper judging are other Scriptures that encourage judging of the proper kind. That is not the focus of today's lesson, but it is a teaching that we must keep in mind. Jesus told those skeptical of Him to "judge righteous judgment" (John 7:24). Paul reminded the Corinthian church that "*the saints shall judge the world*" (1 Corinthians 6:2). And they are to use God's clear teaching (such as that cited in 1 Corinthians 5 and 6 involving sexual immorality) to call each other to purity and to separate themselves from the impure who claim to be Christians.

Christians must not try to judge unbelievers for their wrongdoing; that is the job of civil authorities (Romans 13:1-5). But they must apply Christian standards to those who profess faith in Christ, and they must address failure with an eye toward repentance and recovery. And they are to settle disputes among themselves by themselves, rather than bringing other Christians before a pagan court.

There are no limits to God's judgment. There are limits to ours. That's why the Scripture for today is so important!

Unqualified Judge (Romans 2:1-4)

We know this pattern within ourselves all too well. We tend to raise our voices loudest against those sins in others that are no temptation at all for us (so we can feel quite superior), or against those that have been the greatest problem for us (so we can divert attention away from our own flaws). Any Christian who commits a sin against which he or she has spoken passionately has ruined his or her witness-possibly beyond repair.

This is what upsets Paul the most-the double standard. "Don't do as I do-do as I say." One set of rules for you and another for me!

*"It is usually said by commentators that, the sin of the heathen world having been established in the first chapter (Romans 1), the second (Romans 2) has reference exclusively to the Jews. But this is surely not so. The expressions in verses 1, 3 seem evidently to include all who judge others; and it is not till verse 9 that any distinction between Jew and Gentile comes in"

(The Pulpit Commentary: Romans. 2004 H. D. M. Spence-Jones, Ed.).

"The judgment of God" (2:2) is presented as present and ongoing, as well as future and final. This judgment is "according to truth," which is revealed to us in the Bible (Ps. 19:9; John 17:17). As Abraham said, "*Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*" (Gen. 18:25)."God judges things as they really are. Truth applies the same standard to the same things for all people" (Allen, ed., Broadman Bible Commentary, Broadman).

We are familiar with how modern society has attempted to "repackage" certain sins so as to mask their true identity and lessen their offensiveness. Homosexuality is an "alternative lifestyle"; abortion is just another means of "birth control." Christians are not immune from this same practice. Stealing is never acceptable, but my inaccurate accounting to the Internal Revenue Service is justified because of how the government wastes money. Other people gossip; I "pass along helpful information."

Get serious! We know better! And we had better live according to what we know. It is impossible to "escape the judgment of God" (Rom. 2:3; cf. 1 Thess. 5:3).

1. Why did Paul say, "You, therefore, have no excuse" (Rom. 2:1-3)? *Who did he write this to?

Certainly the knowledge of God's judgment should give us pause when we are tempted to judge others. We must not forget that the grounds for all judgment come from God Himself. God judges all according to the truth. However, if we completely separate ourselves from exercising any degree of discernment, we would ourselves be in violation of God's truth. It is a delicate balance-weighting God's Word, our own flawed practice of that Word, the expectation of our own judgment by God, and the need to confront lovingly those who are not adhering to God's Word. All of us must pray for wisdom to keep these factors in proper balance.

2. How should the knowledge of God's ultimate judgment influence our judgment of others? Does this mean that we should never exercise judgment of others' morality, wisdom, or interpretation of Scripture?

If we are so arrogant as to judge others while ignoring our own sin, we may be too blind to see the need for our repentance and to avail ourselves of the riches of God's goodness. That condition will never change unless we are honest with ourselves and with God and repent. The word "repentance" literally means "to change the mind" and carries with it the idea of a corresponding change of life. It is God's desire "that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9) and confess Jesus as Lord (Rom. 10:9,10).

Surely we can see how patient God has been-with people such as Old Testament Israel, the first disciples of Jesus, and us. We should not deceive ourselves by thinking that such patience reflects God's indifference to our sinfulness. It does not! "The failure to repent transforms God's kindness into wrath" (Allen).

3. What leads us to repentance (v. 4)?

Qualified Judge (Romans 2:5-11)

Those who exhibit stubborn and unrepentant hearts are treasuring up God's wrath to be unleashed upon them on the "day of wrath," when God's righteous judgment will be fully revealed. Just as we can lay up treasures in heaven (Matt. 6:20), so we can store up God's wrath for the coming Judgment Day (Matt. 23:32-33; 1 Thess. 2:16; Rev. 11:18).

The same sun causes wax to melt and clay to harden. So it is with the gospel message (cf. Heb. 3:7-8). Like the hard ground on which the seed fell in the parable of the sower (Mark 4:15), some are unreceptive to the Word of God. Others may have a superficial response (vs. 16-19) and ultimately prove unfruitful. Only those who bear fruit (v. 20) reveal that they have "an honest and good heart" (Luke 8:15).

While we do not know many of the details concerning the judgment, we do know that it will be a "*righteous judgment*" (Rom. 2:5). While confident that God will always do the right thing in each and every situation, we must not presume on His grace or mercy. As Hebrews 10:31 says, "*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*"

4. According to verse 5, what will be the basis for judgment?

Although salvation is by grace, our works are not unimportant. The actions we take (and those we avoid) reveal the depth and the seriousness of our commitment and our faith. Just as important as our actions are the motives behind them. If our motivation for good deeds is to seek God and please Him, if our deeds flow from the grace we have received, then His blessing will follow. If our motivation is selfish, then our "good works" will earn the contempt they deserve.

"Paul was not teaching salvation by character or good deeds. He was explaining another basic principle of God's judgment: God judges according to deeds, just as He judges according to truth" (Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary, Victor).

5. If we are under God's grace, why does Paul emphasize that God "will repay each person according to what they have done" (v. 6)? Is Paul advocating a works salvation? Explain.

While no amount of good works can secure our redemption, "patient continuance in well doing" is clear and necessary evidence of our salvation. "Patient continuance" translates one Greek word and can also be rendered "patient endurance," "persistence," or "perseverance."

Christians should be continuing in "well doing" so that they can hear from the Lord, "*Well done, good and faithful servant*" (Matt. 25:21). Those who received that commendation in Christ's parable of the talents were so honored because they used both the opportunities and the resources their master had given them. So it should be with all Christian servants.

Those rewarded with "*eternal life*" (Rom. 2:7) are those whose faith in Christ cause them to seek glory, honor,

and immortality. As the Prophet Isaiah said, "*Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near.*" (55:6).

The word translated "contentious" comes from a word meaning "strife," or "self seeking," and it is so rendered elsewhere (Gal. 5:20). The picture is that of people who have no regard for truth but "obey unrighteousness" (Rom. 2:8) by living wickedly.

6. What is the difference between "patient continuance" and being "contentious" (vs. 7,8)?

For those who reject the truth of God's Word, only "*trouble and distress*" (2:9) await them. Just as God desires all to "*come into the knowledge of the truth*" (I Tim. 2:4), so judgment for "every human being who does evil" (Rom. 2:9), whether Jew or Gentile.

This being the case, Jews should not look on the Gentiles with contempt. Although the Jews had a privileged place in God's plan, they had suffered judgment in the past when they failed to obey God. So it will be in the judgment that Paul envisioned here. They will fare no better than the pagan Gentiles if they continue to reject God.

7. Who will God's judgment fall on (v. 9)?

A great scriptural truth is that "there is no respect of persons with God." This means that He does not show favoritism toward any person. Peter learned this when sent to the home of Cornelius (Acts 10:34,35). "This awesome fact should make it absolutely clear that Christians are not to consider one human being above another as to basic rights, basic nature, or basic opportunities" (Thomas, Romans, Sweet).

Just as judgment will fall on all those who do not obey the gospel of Christ (2 Thess. 1:8), so "*glory, honor, and peace*" (Rom. 2:10) will come upon all those who seek and serve the Lord.

Paul preached the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles (1:16). Now he declared that both judgment and reward could come upon Jews and Gentiles alike (2:9,10).

8. What does it mean that God is not a respecter of persons (vs. 10,11)?

God's Reasonable Judgment (Romans 2:12-16)

Gentiles did not have the privilege of receiving God's law as did the nation of Israel. Gentiles who did not follow the light they had received, however, would still "*perish apart from the law.*"

On the other hand, the Jews who had "*received the law that was given through angels*" (Acts 7:53) did not keep it. Jews would therefore be judged by the law they had received. Of course, the purpose of the law was not to save but to identify sin (Rom. 2:21-23; 3:20; 7:7). If the law could save, Christ's death would have been completely unnecessary (Gal. 2:21).

"Of those who live under law not one can be acquitted. They have all, without exception, sinned, and must all, without exception, be condemned. By the law, God can acquit no one who has broken it" (Lard, Romans, Christian Board of Publication).

9. What was the purpose of God's law (v. 12)?

While hearing God's Word is essential to an obedient faith (1:5; 10:16,17; 16:26), hearing the law-or even the gospel-can save no one. But hearing does make one responsible before God to either accept or reject the message heard.

As Paul declared, though, "*those who obey the law who will be declared righteous*" (2:13). While the Jews

claimed to keep God's law, they failed to do so. "The Jewish Law only made the guilt of Israel that much greater! . . . The very Law that the Jews claimed to obey only indicted them!" (Wiersbe).

10. What does the hearing of God's Word trigger (v. 13)?

Although Gentiles did not have the revelation of God in the Mosaic law, this did not mean that they had no knowledge of either God or His will. Throughout the world, most cultures have some awareness of the basic moral standards that are taught in the Bible. Virtually all societies recognize that murder, adultery, stealing, and lying are wrong. This is not accidental, for the human race had knowledge of God in the beginning but cast it aside as they began to worship idols (1:18-32).

Nevertheless, some Gentiles attempted to walk in the light they had written on their consciences. This does not mean that we can simply allow conscience alone to guide us in moral decision making. Unless one's conscience is trained by the Word of God, one will quickly go astray. In fact, if we reject biblical teaching, our conscience can become completely insensitive to God's will (1 Tim. 4:2).

This raises the whole question of the state of those who have never heard the gospel. "Before Christ's death on the cross, people were accepted by God when they responded in faith to what He had revealed to them about Himself and about their sin" (DeHaan, What About Those Who Have Never Heard? RBC Ministries).

When Paul preached the gospel in Athens, he viewed the time before Christ as a time of ignorance that God overlooked (Acts 17:30). That time ended with the church age and the command to preach the gospel to the whole world (Mark 16:15,16).

The status of those who have never heard about Christ is a matter of heated debate. To conclude that people are better off not hearing the gospel is absurd, though. "Those who are condemned will be judged because they have not responded to what God has revealed about Himself through conscience and the eloquent witness of nature" (DeHaan).

Our call is to "preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:2) to all the world, not to judge the world. That is a divine prerogative and not our concern.

11. What is the status of those who have never heard the gospel (vs. 14, 15)? What is our responsibility regarding people who have never heard about Christ?

If we hold our neighbors in contempt rather than seeing them with compassion, we certainly cannot effectively share God's grace. Refusing to witness is a greater judgment than witnessing. The first attitude says, "You are irredeemable." The second says, "I am a fellow sinner, but I have found a better way." Remember that Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. We dare not allow our churches or our testimonies to exist only for the sake of the saved!

12. How can our judgment of our neighbors affect our evangelism of them? Isn't witnessing itself a form of judgment?

Verses 13-15 are treated as a parenthesis, providing added commentary on the theme of judgment raised in verse 12. With the verse before us, Paul concludes his comments on judgment by calling attention to the day when the secrets of men will be judged. Yes, the doers of the law will be justified rather than the hearers (v. 13), but God's judgment will also examine the inner thoughts and motives. Such a universal failure and a universal need serve to introduce the universal solution.

That solution is highlighted by the reference to Jesus Christ as the One by whom God will carry out His judgment. How can this be part of the gospel, or good news? The good news is that our judge is also our advocate (1 John 2:1)-the One who, as one illustrative image has described it, removed His royal robes, came

down from the judicial bench, and offered to take the punishment that we, though guilty, should have received. Those who refuse to accept that solution of grace will face condemnation.

Note Paul's reference to my gospel. That term reflects no selfishness on the apostle's part. Today the gospel is ours-not to be hoarded but to be shared with the world. We are stewards of that blessing, even as we are stewards of everything we have (1 Corinthians 4:7).

13. What is the ultimate standard in judgment? Why (v. 16)?

Conclusion

Our own failures put us in no position to judge someone else's failures. Whatever our heritage or our history, we are all in the same boat (and the boat is sinking!). We need help. We need to be rescued. And in order for that to happen, there must be a confession on our part. We must acknowledge that we are to blame for our condition. Even though we may be inclined to confess our neighbor's sin or compare ourselves with someone far worse in our eyes, we must end such self-deceit. We must confess our personal sin and our personal need for Jesus as our Savior. That will change our perspective on our neighbor, too, as we realize that judging is not our job-it's God's.

Prayer

Our Father, most of us studying today have gratefully confessed Christ and accepted Your good news. Now we present for Your use our lives, willing to confess Jesus before those who do not know Him. To You be the glory forever for all You have done. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Thought to Remember

Don't take God's grace for granted.