

Romans: God Will Judge Justly

Romans 2:5-11

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June 18, 2000

If you have your Bibles, I would invite you to turn with me to Romans chapter 2. We will be reading verses 5-11. Let me remind you where we have come from so far. The apostle has announced the theme of this book in Romans chapter 1, verses 16 and 17. He has said that the gospel, the gospel that he is preaching is the power of God unto salvation. And in verse 17 of Romans chapter 1, he has specifically said that in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed. Now that may leave you scratching your head. You might have expected him to say that in the Gospel the mercy of God is revealed, or the grace of God is revealed. That is of course true, that the grace and mercy of God is revealed in the gospel. But Paul is especially interested to stress that in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed. And what he says for the next couple of chapters explains why he is so interested to stress that point. But having given that summarization of the gospel, Paul then pauses and from Romans 1:18 all the way to Romans 3:20, moves with a single purpose of emphasizing to us that we are all sinners in need of grace. That we are all under the just condemnation of God and therefore need to find a righteousness in order to be in fellowship with God which is alien to ourselves. A righteousness that we do not possess.

Paul knows, in other words that there are going to be some people who respond to Romans :16 and 17, by saying, "Oh that is very nice Paul, but I don't need the Gospel." And so Paul, from Romans 1:18, following to Romans 3:20, says, "Oh yes, you do need the Gospel. And here is why."

Now in Romans 1:18 to the end of the chapter to Romans 1:32, the apostle specifically zeroes in on the Gentiles. And He makes it clear that the Gentiles in their behavior, in their propensity for sinful desires and degrading passions and depraved minds and behavior actually manifest in themselves rebellion against God and God's judgment on that rebellion. Therefore they are sinners, they are pervasively sinful and that they need grace. And so the apostle, as we have already seen brings a strong charge against the immoral Gentile world of his day.

Now all along, the religious people of the day, in Paul's case the Jewish people of his own time, are nodding their heads. They are saying, Paul you are exactly

right. Those people are horrible. They are immoral. The judgment of God does justly fall upon them and Paul suddenly turns to the religious people of his own day, and he says, and now I have something that I would like to say to you. And we started to see his argument unfold as we looked at Romans chapter 2, verse 1. He says, therefore you are without excuse. Because even as you bring judgment against those who are wicked, you are committing the same crimes.

And he goes on in verse 2, and he says, now you know that God's judgment rightly falls on these, because you have been judging them yourselves. You have been saying, surely they deserve judgment. And Paul says, so you know that God justly judges those who do these things, and in fact you do these things. He says, do you think you are going to get pass God's judgment, if you are doing the same things that the immoral Pagans are doing, and yet you have not embraced the grace of God as it is offered in the Gospel.

In fact, he goes on in verse 4 to say, if you have not embraced the grace of God as it is offered in the Gospel, then you are thinking lightly of God's patience. Why is it that God is patient, Paul says? He is patient in order that we might repent. That we might see our sin, that we might see our need of grace and flee to Christ for that grace. And so the apostle Paul has begun an argument against the religious people of his day. This is so important for us to hear. Those of us who are church-going Christians. Because the apostle knows that at any given church, there are going to be some people who think they are in saving fellowship with God but who in fact, are not. They are deluding themselves. They have never really seen their sin, they have never really seen what the grace of God in Christ means and they have never embraced Christ by faith. And so he is bringing to bear, God's word, in order to expose that very phenomenon. So let's hear God's holy word in Romans 2, beginning in verse 5.

But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who WILL RENDER TO EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. *There will be* tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to every man who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God.

Thus ends this reading of God's holy and inspired word. May He add His blessing to it. Let's pray.

Our Lord, Your word is for us. You intend us to see the truth by Your spirit as Your word is read and proclaimed. Help us to have listening ears, hearing words, that we might hear and do the truth of God. Search out our hearts, see if there is

any unclean thing in us. Root it out. Show it to us. Give us the grace to hate sin and to run to Christ. We ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Two businessmen, we will call them, Bob and Bill, are having a cup of coffee and they are lamenting the moral state of our nation. They are ranging to and fro over a whole host of topics and concerns that they have about the United States in our time, and Bill, one of these men, is being vigorously critical of those who are leading our nation morally astray. And then, for a time, he is especially critical of the way the judicial system is failing to punish crime. Then the subject turns to religion. Now both of these men are churchgoers. Both, Bob and Bill. And everyone would guess that Bill was a Christian. He is nice. He is moral. He is a family man. But he really doesn't understand sin and grace. And he attends a local church where the Gospel is not preached. The Bible is not held up as the only authority for faith and life. And the Gospel is not explicitly emphasized in the preaching. He attends every Sunday morning, but he doesn't really live his life during the week with any kind of self-conscious commitment to the lordship of Christ or Christian principals. And if you ask him, and Bob is about to, if you ask him why he thought he was right with God, he would basically tell you something like this: He is trusting in his own goodness and in God's benevolence.

And so sure enough as the conversation turns to religion, Bill asks a question. Or Bill is asked a question by Bob. Bob says to him, "What are you trusting in for your salvation? What is your ultimate hope for salvation. And why should God grant you eternal life?" And the answer is very candid. Bill says to him, "Well, I think that I am a fairly moral person. I try and live according to God's Word, and I think that God will take into consideration my good intentions and He will overlook those things where I have fallen short." Bob then says to him this: "So, Bill, you think that God is less concerned about justice than you are?" Bill had just been lamenting about how judges were failing to punish crime, and yet when it came to spiritual things, he thought that the divine judge would cut us all a little slack. That is precisely the kind of thinking that the apostle Paul is contradicting in this passage. Paul is out to prove that everyone is a sinner. And everyone is under just condemnation and that we cannot save ourselves or expect salvation apart from Christ as he is offered in the Gospel. And he presses that truth home in three parts in this passage. And I would like to look at those with you this morning.

1. If you really understand the way God's judgment will be executed, you are going to plea for mercy.

First of all, in verses 5 and 6, Paul tells us a couple of really stunning things in these verses. He tells us that we are accumulating our own condemnation and he tells us that God is going to judge us by works. Now I fully realize how shocking that last announcement may be to some of you. But let me repeat it. Paul tells us in verses 5 and 6 that we are accumulating our own condemnation

and that we are going to be judged by works, by our deeds, by our life. And now Paul tells us this because he knows that if we really understand God's judgment, if we really the way God's judgment will be executed, we are not going to be tempted to stand before Him in our own righteousness. We are going to plea for mercy. And we are going to flee to some other place than our own righteousness. Most people, you see, who are religious, church-going, but apart from Christ, are outwardly moral. They are religious in their frame of mind, but they are apart from Christ. Most people like that think that they are pretty good, and that God is going to grade on a curve. He is going to cut them some slack. And therefore, their hope of salvation rests in the fact that they are relatively nice people with good intentions, and that God will be relatively benevolent in the way in which He administers His judgment. This person thinks that God will judge them sort of in a general way, looking at their overall good intentions while giving them slack for the evil that they have done.

And Paul has two stunning surprises for a person thinking this way. The first surprise you see in verse 5. There he says, that if we are unrepentant, if we obstinate. If we have refused to see our sin, and run from it to God, if we have been obstinate, if God is not at the center of our life, if we have not embraced God, by the Gospel, then he says, we are busily building a case against ourselves. It is like being a defendant and everyday hastily pulling together a file of all the reasons why we ought to be convicted of sin and sending it to the prosecuting attorney's office, with a note, make sure and don't miss this. This will be important for the trial. We are building a case against ourselves if we are resting in our own righteousness. The person addressed here by reason of his hardness of heart is represented as being an agent for piling up wrath against himself. It is God's wrath, but he is piling it up by the way he is living. By his own heart.

And secondly, Paul goes on to say in verse 6, that God's judgment is going to be strictly according to deeds. Strictly according to our works, our lives. Everything is going to be taken into account. God's judgment is going to be according to works. Now let me say, that is not a uniquely Pauline teaching. Jesus says that more frequently than Paul does. In fact, for example, you could turn to Matthew chapter 16, verse 27. Where Jesus says this, the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His father, with His angels. And He will then repay every man according to his deeds. Jesus and Paul both teach the truth. That we will all give an account before God and that our lives will be measured in the balance of God's judgment. Salvation is by grace. That is Paul's emphatic point throughout the book of Romans. But, judgment is by works. Justification is by grace through faith. But our condemnation will be in accord with God's justice and will be produced because of our own evil works.

Paul is stressing here, just like Jesus is in Matthew 16, verse 27, three things. He is stressing that everyone, everyone will come under the searching judgment of God. The question is, will that person be found righteous or not? Notice what He

says, I will repay every man according to his deeds. I will render to each person according to his deeds. So the universality of God's judgment is emphasized.

Secondly the criterion of that judgment is emphasized, deeds, works, our life before the judgment throne of God, and finally the certainty of God rendering judgment of His executing judgment. I will repay, I will render judgment is emphasized both by Jesus and Paul. Therefore those who take refuge, for their eternal hope in a sort of generally moral life and in God judging on the curve are in for the worst sort of shock. The apostle Paul says here, if you really understand the way God's judgment is executed, you are going to flee to God for mercy.

2. In the end, there are only two types of people in this world: God-centered and self-centered.

And then he goes on to say in verses 7-10 that there are two kinds of people in the world. And he illustrates these two kinds of people by showing us their ambitions, their desires, their lives, and their end, their ultimate destiny. He contrasts these two kinds of people by showing their desires, their lives, and their ends. In the end, there are only two types of people in this world. Those who God-centered, and those who are self-centered.

I realize, of course, that it is not very politically correct to divide the world into two kinds of people. We are all supposed to be one. But the apostle Paul, following our Lord Jesus Christ consistently divides the world into two kinds of people. And the apostle Paul does that for a very specific reason here. Again he is speaking to people, who are religious and outwardly moral, some of whom are very comfortable in their eternal hopes. But who ought not to be comfortable in their eternal hopes, because they have rejected the Gospel, and they have rejected the Gospel and they don't think the Gospel is for them. And so he sets side by side these two visions of the godly and the ungodly, of the righteous and the unrighteous, of the believer and the unbeliever, of the person who has embraced the gospel, and the person who has not embraced the gospel.

And here is the picture. Look at verses 7 and 10. In this nice parallelism in verses 7 and 10 he discusses the believer. In verses 8 and 9, he discusses the unbeliever. He tells us about the aspiration of the believer. He says, you want to see a believer, you want to see what he is aspiring after, what he desires, he desires glory and honor an immortality. Let's think about it for a minute. It doesn't sound very humble to strive to aspire for glory, does it? But Paul says, you know the believer strives for glory, not glory in this life, not to be glorified amongst men, but the glory of being conformed to the image of the son. The glory of being made like the Lord Jesus Christ. That is what he aspires for. That is what he longs for. And he strives for honor. And again, that doesn't sound very humble does it? He striving, for honor, but it is not honor among men that he is striving

for. He is striving for that honor whereby Jesus says, "Well done, My good and faithful servant." This person is striving for the approval of Christ. He doesn't care what the world thinks about him. He doesn't care for the world's approval. He doesn't care for the world's approval. He just wants to hear those words one day, "Well done, My good and faithful servant." That is all the affirmation he needs. That is all the honor he needs, is the honor that comes from the mouth of the king, the Lord Jesus Christ. And he is striving for immortality, referring to the resurrection hope of the Christian. He is not just looking for hope in this life. His hope is the life to come. That heavenly Canaan. That is where his hope is. And Paul says, this person, his life, is characterized by enduring in godliness. Enduring in good deeds. He does the word. That is what his life is characterized by. And once he is end, eternal life.

Now notice what Paul has not said. Paul has not said that this person has earned his salvation by his good deeds, nor has he said, that he has earned his salvation by his aspirations, by his desires. But he has said, the person who has met Christ in the gospel and embraced Him by faith, is a person who is characterized by these kinds of aspirations, by this kind of life. He is saved by grace. But his life is transformed by that grace so that his desires are different from the world, and his life is different from the world.

And then he says, and let me show you the ungodly. His life is centered upon himself. Selfish ambition is his fundamental aspiration. His concern when he is concerned about God is to use God as a means to his ends. For God to help him get the things that he wants. What is his life characterized by? Paul tells you in verse 8 and 9. He is a person who does not obey the truth, but rather obeys unrighteousness. What is his end? Tribulation. Trouble, distress, wrath, and indignation. Now look, Paul's point here is not that you have to murder someone to be unrighteous manifested merely by neglecting the kindness of God in refusing to embrace the Gospel. To be unrighteous, all you have to do is reject the truth of God. And so the apostle Paul says, there you are, two kinds of people. Two kinds of people in the world. And we must all take stock of ourselves, and ask ourselves, what do our lives say about who we are? What do our desires say about who we are? What do we really want, because in the end, we will get what we really want. If we are God-centered, if our hope is in Him, that hope will be consummated. But if we haven't ultimately wanted Him, then He will grant us our wish. And we will forego Him forever.

3. Don't presume upon your status nor upon God bending the rules.

And so Paul goes on to say in verse 11, that there is not partiality with God. He is saying to us, not to presume upon our status. Don't presume on God bending the rules. He is speaking here of the impartiality of God, the presumption that some people have that God is going to show them favor, and finding that presumption as the shelter that they have from God's judgment. Favoritism is preferring

someone without good reason. And this verse is a reassertion of the justice of God's judgment. Paul has already talked about that in verse 2. God judges justly. His judgment is righteous. But he wants to reemphasize it. God will judge in accordance with reality. He will not show favoritism. He will not show partiality. He will not show preference without reason. So the criterion of God's judgment is not privilege. It is not position. But it is affirmed repeatedly in these previous verses. The character of men's lives. He will weigh justly.

You see many people assume, they presume that God will grade on a curve. They presume on God's grace, rather than seeking it. It is ironic, isn't it? They will say, Well, I have lived a pretty good life." And indicated, at least superficially, that they believe that they saved themselves by their works. But when you ask them, "Now do you strictly think that God is going to judge you exactly as you have lived?" "Well you know, God will take into consideration some, you know He will give a little flexibility here in His judgment." What are they doing? They are presuming on God's grace. One minute they are saying, "I don't need God's grace," but the next minute they are assuming that He is going to universally distribute it to everyone. And their presumption is a shadow. It is a ephemeral. It will evaporate on the last day. And the apostle Paul says, don't presume on the kindness of God. Seek it. Plea for it. Throw yourself at the feet of Christ. Ask God for mercy and He will grant it. But don't presume on it. Don't live life thinking well everything will work out fine. Live life knowing that there is a judgment. And at that judgment will take into account everything that you have ever done. And make sure that your righteousness is not your own righteousness, but that your righteousness is Christ's righteousness. You can only receive it by faith, by trusting in Him, by repudiating your own life and saying, Lord I am not going to stand before you in this life, but clothed in the righteousness of Christ. I accept Him. I trust in Him. As you set Him forth in the Gospel. I trust in that Lord Jesus Christ. I receive Him as my Savior. I acknowledge Him as my Lord. I want His righteousness credited to my account, even as He has died in my place for my sins.

We need a sheltering from judgment. But where can it be found? Only in Christ. We need a sheltering from judgment. Where can it be found? Not in presumption. But in the real saving grace of God. We need a sheltering from judgment. But where can it be found? In our works? No. In the works of Christ. We need a sheltering from judgment. But where can it be found? It can't be found in our lives, but only by faith in the life and death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul's main concern throughout this passage is to take away from everyone who hears him, every conceivable prop on which we might lean for our self justification for acceptance with God. And he refuses us to allow us to rest in any privilege, in any possession, in any knowledge of the law. But he holds up before us, our lives, and he says, how will this life look in light of the final judgment, knowing that God is going to judge with exact justice.

Now Paul does that because he knows that unless we consider that deeply, we

will be tempted to think that God is going to look over the blemishes and see the few nice things that we have done along the way. Or more than that, Paul knows that we will be deceived about the real nature of our hearts. Because our lives are not ultimately characterized by general niceness with a few blemishes along the way, but our hearts are black with sin apart from the grace of God in Christ.

And so the apostle Paul wants us to see ourselves, and then see the judgment of God. Not so that we will work harder to save ourselves, but so that we will cease from attempting to justify ourselves before God, and run to Christ for mercy, and ask Him to make us stand righteous before God. That is why David Dixon could say, that he made a heap of all his good deeds and all his bad deeds and fled from them to Christ. That is faith, that is justifying faith, to run from our deeds and to run to Christ's deeds and to trust those alone to justify us before God. That is an issue for everyone of us today. It doesn't matter whether our grandfather was in this church. It doesn't matter whether we have grown up knowing the *Catechism*. If we have not embraced Christ, or rather been embraced by Him for salvation, as He has offered in the Gospel, we are in the same position as those to whom Paul was speaking when he first wrote those words. And so his words are as relevant today as the minute that he penned them. May God enable us to see the truth and to respond accordingly. Let's pray.

Our heavenly Father, we bless You for Your word. We ask that You would show us ourselves. I ask this day, O God, that there would be men and women and boys and girls who would see the grace of God and the justice of God displayed so clearly that they cannot but embrace Him by faith. We ask, O God, that You would hear our prayers, and that You would redeem us by the blood of Your Son. We ask these things, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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