

## **DON'T THINK YOU CAN ESCAPE GOD'S JUDGMENT (SUNDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2011)**

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**SCRIPTURE READING:** PSALM 62; ROMANS 2:1-11

Emotions or feelings are generally very powerful influences on a person's behavior. As an example think of the effect that an important sports game has on people. Profound joy and sadness are experienced by millions of people based on the outcome of a game. And yet what is the real significance of that game to life? I know that after games like the Super Bowl, grief counselors advertise their services to encourage the downcast.

Advertisers carefully work with the feeling of need. Do you pay attention to how many products are advertised based on the concepts of "you deserve this" or "this will make you happy"?

People tend to want to feel good about their own abilities. This is especially true in our own nation where a generation has been raised on the idea of self-esteem. I heard this a few years ago, but I would guess it is still the case, that students in the US tend to think higher of their abilities in mathematics than do students in Korea, even though Korean students have higher scores on standardized tests.

The most dangerous feeling that people have is that they are good enough for heaven because they are really not as bad as others. I have probably done enough good things, I have basically been a good enough person to deserve God's eternal blessing. How many millions of people in our nation could be characterized by this idea, though it may not always be expressed or be the result of careful reasoning?

Paul obviously wasn't addressing the typical American mindset in writing the book of Romans in about A.D. 57. And yet in chapter 2, Paul was dealing with those who wrongly believed or felt that they were better than others and would some how escape the perfect judgment of God.

**Those who don't think or feel they are too bad still face the wrath of a righteous God.**

We will look at Romans 2:1-11 in three parts. First I would like to present the context of our passage and consider again where we are heading in Romans. Then we will give attention to verses 1-11 in two parts; verses 1-5 and verses 6-11.

### **1. CONTEXT**

What is the central focus of the book of Romans? It is summarized in Romans 1:16-17.

**Rom. 1:16** For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. **17** For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "*The just shall live by faith.*"

It is important to keep in mind that although the word gospel is found in Romans 1:16, Paul does not begin until Romans 3:21 to clearly discuss the gospel message. Romans 1:18-3:20 is

focused on showing that all Jews and Gentiles stand before a holy God without any hope that could be found in their own goodness or works.

There are several passages in Romans 2 which taken out of context almost seem to state people can follow the law and justification and salvation can be obtained by obedience. But that is clearly not what Paul means when you look at the larger context of Romans 1-3. Look with me at several key verses beginning with Romans 1:18.

**Rom. 1:18** For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

What are some of the key points that Paul makes in verses 18-32?

All men are without excuse because God has revealed Himself sufficiently through creation.

The knowledge of God is suppressed through unrighteous and wicked actions.

Men in their rebellion exchange God's glory, truth, and the created order to worship idols and satisfy their perverted desires.

God gives up men and women to uncleanness, vile passions, and a depraved mind.

The rejection of God leads to a host of vile sins, some of which are listed in verses 29-31.

**Rom. 1:32** who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

Romans 2 continues the discussion of judgment applying it to those who think or feel they are not so bad. Here we find a powerful exposure of hypocrisy.

Romans 2:17 through the end of chapter 2 focuses on Jewish people who don't understand properly their own sinfulness and need of Jesus Christ.

**Rom. 2:17** Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God,

The difficult question is who is Paul's specific target audience in verses 1-16? Does Paul have in mind Jews or moralistic Gentiles? Commentators are divided in their opinions here. Some argue eloquently that Paul is speaking primarily to those of Jewish background while others argue their points for why Paul is speaking to those who are Gentiles.<sup>1</sup> Does it have to be one or the other? Maybe not. I can't give an expert opinion, but I would be more inclined to say that Paul is especially focused on those of Jewish background, but I think the passage can still be understood even if we can't give a definitive answer.

Paul in chapter 3 opens by dealing with those who would oppose his message by twisting it to say that God has not been faithful to His promises or that God's work in the OT has no significance

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<sup>1</sup> Moo advocates a Jewish audience while Witherington a moralistic Gentile audience.

for Jews. No, the Jewish people had a great advantage chiefly because they enjoyed the Word of God. But this advantage does not give them any grounds for presumption.

**Rom. 3:9** What then? Are we better *than they*? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.

**Rom. 3:20** Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.

Then beginning with Romans 3:21 Paul discusses the glorious truth of the gospel applying it to both Jews and Gentiles. This discussion of justification by faith alone continues through the end of chapter 4.

## **2. YOU CAN'T ESCAPE GOD'S JUDGMENT AND YOU SHOULD CONSIDER HOW WICKED YOU ARE, vv. 1-5.**

If you look at verses 1-5 and verses 6-11, you can see a change in pronoun. Verses 1-5 use the second person pronoun, **you**. Do you see that in verses 1, 3, 4, and 5? Then in verses 6-11, Paul switches to the third person – his, those, everyone.

In verses 1-5, Paul uses a style of writing or speaking that is called *diatribe*. It is a style where Paul writes like he is carrying on an argument with an opponent. This style is seen in about 9 places throughout Romans.<sup>2</sup> It is characterized by questions and by the use of the second person pronoun, you.

Can you think of another book in the NT that has sections that could also be classified as *diatribe*? The book of James might be the best example.<sup>3</sup>

Romans 2:1 begins with the word **therefore**. This word means that there is some sort of connection or logical progression that is being made. The word **therefore** could point back to previous material or introduce a conclusion to material that follows.<sup>4</sup> Verse 1 also uses the word translated as **inexcusable**. This same word is used in Romans 1:20, so that they are without **excuse**. There are different opinions on what the word **therefore** is connecting, but I believe it makes sense that it makes a connection between the wrath of God falling upon men and women who perhaps in a more flagrant way show their rebellion and upon others who think they are better and make judgments on others.<sup>5</sup> The wrath of God is expressed against those who show their rebellion and against those who manage to hide their rebellion.

It seems in our world today the only sin left is judging other people. But you can see the logical inconsistency of those who go around judging people who are judging other people. Notice that Paul is judging here. Paul is calling attention to hypocrisy not just the problem of judging other

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<sup>2</sup> Witherington III, Ben, and Darlene Hyatt. *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Kindle Edition ed. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004. 75.

<sup>3</sup> Moo, Douglas J. *The Epistle to the Romans*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996. 125.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 129. He discusses the different options that other commentators have taken here.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 129-130. Moo's idea is similar to the point I am making.

people. The emphasis here is not **stop judging others** but rather you are guilty of some of the same sins you are pointing out in others.

Recall that in Romans 1:29-31, the listing of sins is very broad, encompassing sins that are more outward and sins that are more private. Those who think of themselves as being good enough for heaven because they are not murderers or adulterers do not take seriously the other sins that Paul lists. You may not think of yourself as an evil person but you are not the standard as Paul shows in verse 2.

**2** But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things.

The expression **we know** is used 5 times in Romans. Can you think of the most well known verse that uses **we know**? Romans 8:28.

Paul makes a very important point in verse 2. The issue of judging others easily becomes very confused. Even many non-Christians like to quote Matthew 7:1 out of context, **Judge not, that you be not judged.**

What we need to make clear to the world is that we are not seeking to judge people based on our own standards or because we are perfect but that God is righteous in His judgments.

The bottom line is not who is worthy of being able to judge another person, but rather what does the Word of God declare?

One of the most ludicrous arguments that I see used today by those who favor the abomination of same-sex marriage is what I call the Kim Kardashian or Brittany Spears argument. If you don't know who these people are, you are blessed. Just because other people pervert the institution of marriage doesn't mean that it is open for whatever definition you want to give. One abomination doesn't justify another abomination. Hypocrisy is a serious problem, but hypocrisy doesn't excuse other sins.

Paul in verses 3 and 4 asks two rhetorical questions which are characteristic of a *diatribe* style.

**3** And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? **4** Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

Paul makes two very important and related points in these two verses. Though you think you are better than others, you will not escape the judgment of God because you also are guilty of many sins. The second point is that you are misinterpreting God's goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, thinking that all must be well with your soul and denying your need of repentance. The reason you are not in hell right now is not because you are not worthy of hell but rather God is giving you opportunity to turn in faith and repentance.

Paul in verse 4 speaks of the riches of His goodness. The goodness of God refers to the gifts that He gives. Everything that non-Christians enjoy in this life is the result of God's goodness. Paul

speaks very properly of the riches of His goodness. Think of the billionaires around the world, most of whom are probably non-Christians, and yet they enjoy fantastic blessings, as a result of God's gifts to them. Bill Gates could give more than 40,000 of his friends a million dollars for Christmas and still have money to put presents under his Christmas tree.

Verse 4 also speaks of God's forbearance. This refers to the fact that God's wrath in its fullness is not expressed but does not mean its future removal.

The longsuffering of God also in the verse speaks of God's patience in dealing with the provocation from sinners.

God is good, forbearing, and longsuffering so that men and women who are still in rebellion will have opportunity for repentance. Oh, how grateful we are that God has showed us these three specific gifts so that we also were able to hear the gospel message and turn in repentance.

But many people despise these gifts that God has given. They despise the gifts when they don't properly consider the giver of the gifts or the reason they have been given.

When you give a gift to a person, would you like it if he snatched it out of your hand before you could give it as you wanted and then turned away from you without giving you any expression of thanksgiving? Imagine your children responding this way to you on Christmas day? How would you feel? **How much more offensive when this is done to God.** Paul very properly speaks of despising God's gifts.

If Paul in these verses is in a special way addressing unbelieving Jews then, we can draw a comparison here between Paul's indictment and rebuke with that of the prophets of the OT.

Douglas Moo writes,

“The assumption of God's special favor toward his people had already in the OT period become a source of false security for those within Israel who were not living faithfully within the covenant, as the preaching of the prophets abundantly indicates.”<sup>6</sup>

Verse 5 appropriately ends this section with a powerful indictment. Many unbelievers treasure up much wealth, power, and fame. But Paul says to those who remain in their hardness of heart and who show no repentance toward God that they are treasuring up wrath.

They are treasuring up wrath for the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God. Verse 5 speaks of the Day of Judgment. There are quite a few different descriptions for this day given in Scripture. But they are all referring to that final and great day of testing, separation, judgment, eternal blessing, and eternal destruction.

Romans 1:20 declares that God's wrath is already being expressed, but many do not recognize God's wrath as they should. But there will be no one who will miss the Final Day of Wrath.

Verses 1-5 in summary then state, “You can't escape God's judgment and you should consider how wicked you are.”

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 133.

### 3. GOD WILL JUDGE ALL MEN PERFECTLY AND GIVE WHAT IS DESERVED, vv. 6-11.

I trust you have heard before about a literary style called a chiasmus. A chiasmus or chiasmic structure takes its name from the Greek letter *chi*, which resembles our letter **x**. Now picture in your mind cutting the letter **x** in half vertically and throwing away the right hand portion.

If you look at verses 6-11 carefully, you can see that each verse has another verse which corresponds with it in opposite order. Call verse 6 A, 7 B, 8 C, then in opposite order verse 9 C, 10 B, and 11 A.<sup>7</sup>

Chiasmic structures are very common throughout Scripture, though they don't always jump off the page. There is nothing mysterious about them or about discovering them. They are evidence of thoughtful literary style on the part of Paul and other authors. Greek and Latin literature also commonly used this style.<sup>8</sup>

Sometime in a chiasmus the center is given emphasis, but in this case it is the first and last verse which establish the most important point – God gives to each one according to his deeds. God is not partial in His judgment.

Verse 6 is a quotation from the OT. There are at least two passages that Paul could have quoted from.

**Psalm 62:12** Also to You, O Lord, *belongs* mercy; For You render to each one according to his work.

**Proverbs 24:12** If you say, “Surely we did not know this,” Does not He who weighs the hearts consider *it*? He who keeps your soul, does He *not* know *it*? And will He *not* render to *each* man according to his deeds?

Verse 11 establishes a very similar point. God does not show partiality when He judges. No one can expect to get some sort of a break before God and hope that it excuses them.

Both verses 6 and 11 are not meant to bring comfort to any sinner. Paul is not speaking of the fullness of the gospel message here and how a sinner can ever have any hope of standing before God at the Day of Judgment. He is leading up to that discussion by setting forth the reality of God's perfect justice.

Verses 7 and 10 together and verses 8 and 9 together show that at the Day of Judgment there are only two outcomes – either eternal life or eternal punishment.

Verses 7 and 10 are probably more difficult in light of what we know so clearly taught in Scripture. Will all those who seek glory, honor, and immortality and who endure in doing good receive eternal life? What does this mean?

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 135.

<sup>8</sup> This is according to Wikipedia, s.v. chiasmus.

If you take verses 7 and 10 out of their larger context, you can end up making some dangerous conclusions. But there is no trouble with understanding these verses when you keep in mind what Paul is doing in this section. Though verses 7 and 10 do speak of eternal blessing, the emphasis starting with Romans 1:18 is that of judgment and wrath.

For those who somehow want to argue that works play either a small part of a major part of salvation, the question then comes back to, how much good would a person have to do? Who defines that good?

Again if you just turn to Romans 3:20 it is clear that no man or woman on their own could ever hope to be good enough or do enough good.

**Rom. 3:20** Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.

So verses 7 and 10 are not teaching that some people will actually gain favor with God by doing enough good. Verses 7 and 10 are establishing that God is perfectly just in His judgment and that every person will be judged on the same basis by their works, not religious heritage or national identity.<sup>9</sup>

Verses 8 and 9 together establish that God in His perfect justice will bring a fearsome judgment on those who are self-seeking and who do not obey the truth.

They also will experience God's perfect justice, receiving indignation, wrath, tribulation, and anguish.

Tribulation is a word that Paul uses in other places to describe that which even Christians must endure in this life, but clearly that is not how this word should be understood in verse 9.

Tribulation here refers to the eternal suffering that such a person will face. Distress adds to this description as best it can be described. Douglas Moo suggests that distress may focus on the subjective suffering caused by the objective tribulation.<sup>10</sup>

And note importantly that two times Paul speaks of the equal opportunity given to both Jews and Gentiles with respect to eternal life and eternal judgment. The Jewish people tended to believe that they would be first in terms of eternal life but not first in terms of eternal punishment. But Paul states that because of their place in terms of God's plan of redemption they stand first in terms of both blessing and punishment.

**God will judge all men perfectly and give what is deserved.**

#### **CONCLUSION**

Let me discuss in terms of application and reflection on this passage two related issues that are vital for this congregation: presumption and hypocrisy

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 142.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 139.

**Presumption:** As I mentioned at the beginning of my message, the most dangerous feeling that people have is that they are good enough for heaven because they are really not as bad as others or that they have been to church many times or have been baptized, etc.

The Bible doesn't call you to doubt your salvation rather it calls for you to make sure that your salvation is based on what Jesus Christ has done and nothing else that you have done or even the gracious gifts that God has given.

The Bible doesn't emphasize that you must be able to tell others the day you were converted or that you can give some amazing testimony, but it does command that you be sure you are resting fully in Jesus Christ.

There is danger in presuming or assuming you are a Christian, but the solution is not to doubt, but rather to make sure.

This is a duty not just for those who are young but for all men and women. And there is no shame if you honestly confess that for much of your life you have been playing a game as it were, putting on the appearance of being a true Christian, and yet living a totally contradictory life. There is no shame in confessing that; since God is sovereign, there are many different testimonies that His true people will give.

What unites us together is resting in the perfection of our Lord and His work on the cross. That is the most important thing that we have in common. Make sure this is your testimony.

**Hypocrisy:** There are different forms of hypocrisy in Scripture. In Matthew 6, Jesus identified hypocrisy with doing good works but with the wrong motives. In Matthew 7, Jesus identified hypocrisy with being concerned about others but ignoring your own problems. In Matthew 23, Jesus called attention to the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees who paid the tithe on their spices but ignored justice, mercy, and faith.

However hypocrisy is defined it is a great danger for God's people. Hypocrisy can destroy local churches and bring great shame to the gospel and the name of Christ.

As a local church we must be very sensitive to the danger of hypocrisy especially since we claim to take God's word seriously. Sin rarely remains just a private matter. No, your sin affects others as is even more true for me.

Paul in 1 Cor. 5:6 warned, "Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?"

Since we will never reach perfection the solution to hypocrisy is to be sensitive to the charge and make sure that we are dealing with sin as we should individually and corporately. If someone points out the fact that you may be in sin, don't be quick in responding by pointing out his or her sin, but pause and consider what that person might be saying. Be sensitive first and foremost to Scripture but God also can use others to show you your sin. Pride fuels hypocrisy. When you attack pride, then you are in a position to deal with hypocrisy.

**1 John 3:23-24** And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment. Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.



## **Prayer**

### **Closing Hymn: 243**

#### **Benediction and Commission – Hebrews 13:20-21**

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.