

“Good” People Need God’s Righteousness

Romans 2:1-4

The fact that you feel morally superior to other sinners will not shield you from God’s wrath.

LTS: Rom. 11:11-22

If you have a Bible with you, please open it to Romans chapter 2, stand with me in honor of God’s word and follow along as I read verses 1-4.

Therefore, you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things.² We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things.³ Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God?⁴ Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

He who has ears to hear, let him hear the word of the Lord. You may be seated...

Introduction:

Paul has been teaching us about the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. But before we’re ready to hear the Good News of salvation, we need to have a firm grasp on what Jesus saves us from.

So, for the past few weeks we have been learning about the wrath of God. The reason the Gospel is being revealed is because the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

What does that wrath consist of? We learned last week that while there are at least five kinds of divine wrath, Paul specifically has in mind the wrath of abandonment. (sometimes called Judicial Abandonment).

The worst thing that could ever happen to a sinner is for God to abandon him to his own unrestrained sinful desires. And that’s what God is doing. He is giving unbelievers over to their sins.

First, (as Paul presents it) He gives people over to their heterosexual lusts. Then to homosexual lusts. Finally, he gives them over to a depraved mind by which the moral governor in the heart of a man or woman is so completely callused and disabled that their conscience

becomes insensitive to the law of God written on their hearts. Hence the abject moral confusion in our culture today.

Paul, under the inspiration of the H.S., is revealing to us NOT that the wrath of God is coming, but that it is already here. God is turning people over to their own lusts. This is a frightening prospect when you think about what this means for individuals, communities, and nations. And it's easy for us to point a bony, self-righteous finger at those who have given themselves over to homosexuality and other sins that we intuitively think are worthy of God's righteous wrath.

At the same time, however, we may think that Paul is not talking about relatively moral people like you and me. Such an illusion, however, gets immediately pulverized when, starting with v. 29, Paul presents a list of 20 additional sins, most of which are typically considered inconsequential or even acceptable by popular standards of decency; sins such as Covetousness, Envy, Gossip, Disobedience to parents, Foolishness, Faithlessness and other sins that we commit on a fairly regular basis.

You see, the problem is that we think God is like us; that he tolerates and winks at what we think are little peccadillos that seem insignificant. Yes, of course, God should judge the Hitlers and the Osama Ben Ladens of the world, but surely good people like us don't deserve God's wrath, right?

Well, if we are talking about securing a reconciled relationship with God, we need to look to Him for the answer. And when we do; that is, when we consider what God has said about these things, we learn that God makes no distinction.

All sin is active rebellion against his rule. All sin violates God's Law. Therefore, all sin deserves

- A. the judgment of God,
- B. the punishment of God, and
- C. the wrath of God.

Now up to this point, Paul has been talking about Gentiles. But as we step into chapter 2, the apostle to the Gentiles begins addressing his Jewish brothers. Paul knows he needs to address them because, being a Jew himself, he understands how easy it is for Israelites to give themselves a pass regarding their sin. After all...

- A. God Himself calls them His chosen people They are the promised sons of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
- B. They were the ones God rescued from Egypt by many signs and wonders.
- C. It was exclusively to them that God gave His prophets.
- D. To them he gave to covenants and circumcision as the official sign of the covenant.

- E. The problem was that the Jews eventually viewed the mark of the covenant as the actual covenant itself. In other words, they began to think that God accepted them on the basis of having this mark. But that was NEVER true.
- F. In verse 29 of this same chapter Paul will say,

For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. ²⁹ But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, NOT by the letter.”

Paul doesn't deny that the Jews are a privileged people. Nevertheless, when it comes to needing a Savior, they are no better off than the Gentiles. And that's a hard pill for Jewish people to swallow.

To say the least, the Jews had a very low view of non-Jews. They hated Gentiles. Some of the ancient Rabbi's referred to Gentile men as uncircumcised dogs. They were considered unclean and immoral.

They were viewed as idolaters and filthy sinners.

In ancient Israel Jewish men were encouraged to pray, "Blessed are you, O Lord, that you did not make me a Gentile.”

Many Jews believed that no Gentile would have a share in the eternal kingdom of God. Jews would never enter the home of a Gentile and certainly not eat with them.

Because of these strong beliefs, Paul was rightly concerned that Jewish men and women who considered themselves so much holier and closer to God than everyone else, that they were in danger of failing to grasp their own need for the righteousness of God in Christ.

So, while Paul's teachings here in chap 2 apply to everyone, it was intended specifically for the Jews who are mentioned in verses 9, 10, 17, 28, 29.; 3:1,9. All of these verses demonstrate that Paul's chief concern here is his Jewish brothers, whom he loves. He is determined to warn them that feeling morally superior to other sinners will not shield you from the wrath of God. And Paul delivers this warning by talking about

I. Two kinds of Judgment and

II. Two false hopes.

Let's consider first the

I. Two kinds of Judgment.

1. The first kind of judgment is Human Judgment. It is the kind of judgment “good people” like us and our neighbors render against other sinners who seem so much more sinful than ourselves.
2. The word “Therefore” (v.1) points back to what Paul just said in the previous chapter; namely, that “Since it has been established (1:18-32) that the immoral practices of the gentiles are an abomination to God, no one gets a pass for practicing sin. We are all without excuse before the eyes of God.”¹
3. And consider the people to whom Paul is writing. Paul says,
 - A. YOU have no excuse, and
 - B. You who judges,
 - C. You condemn yourself... Paul is speaking to the Jews in Rome. His Jewish readers are convinced that he must be speaking of the Gentiles, but no! Eight times he says, You! You! You! You who view yourselves as superior to other sinners. You who think God will overlook your sins. You have no excuse
 - no matter how good you think you are
 - No matter how polished your reputation.
 - No matter how elevated your self-esteem.
4. When you judge others for their sinful behavior (1), you judge yourself because you do the same things.
5. You may say, “But I never committed homosexuality, or adultery, or fornication.” Well, perhaps you have never engaged in the actual act, but as far as God is concerned, “sin and righteousness are matters of the heart.” Isn’t this what Jesus taught?
6. In Mark 7:20-23 where Jesus he teaches,

What comes out of a person is what defiles him. ²¹ For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.
7. You see friends, “Man looks at the outward appearance, but God sees the heart.” God is not merely concerned about external behavior. He is mostly concerned about what is going on in your heart. That’s what Jesus meant when he said things like,

If a man looks at a woman with lust, he has already committed adultery in his heart. And if a man becomes sinfully angry at someone, he commits murder in his heart.

¹ Adapted from William Hendriksen, p. 88

8. You may say, “But wait a minute! These things are true of everyone! We all become sinfully angry. We all struggle with various kinds of lust. All of us have gossiped, and slandered, and boasted. From time to time. We all covet.” That’s exactly Paul’s point.

9. When we see and hear such sin in others, we typically form a negative judgment against them . And that is actually a godly impulse. But when you do it, you also cast judgment upon yourself because you are guilty of the same sins. We are sinners – All.

10. This, my friend, is the judgment of man. We judge one another’s sin. But then Paul immediately switches over to the second kind of judgment; namely, the judgment of God.

11. In v. 2 Paul declares, “We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things.”

12. O my moralistic friend, Paul has just backed us all into a corner where there is no escape. All of us are sinners, and all of us deserve the wrath of God.

13. It doesn’t matter what your spiritual privileges were.

- A. Perhaps you grew up in a Christian home.
- B. Maybe you were home schooled and disciplined by Christian parents.
- C. You may have graduated from a Christian university.
- D. You might read the bible every day and attend church services more than once a week. Those are wonderful things, and yes, they are wonderful privileges.

14. Nevertheless, no one is justified in the eyes of God by their spiritual privileges and disciplines. No one gets a pass when it comes to sin. And every time you see sin in others and condemn it from the heart, you cast judgment upon yourself because, in your heart and often with your words and your actions, you do the same things. By judging others, you reveal that you too deserve God’s judgment.

15. Paul doesn’t use the term “Depravity,” but that is the source of this great dilemma before God.

- A. Did you see these beautiful children this morning? They are all sinners. I suspect most of them have already demonstrated that to their parents quite clearly. It doesn’t take long before they will be more inclined to hit you with their sippy-cup in an act of pure rebellion than obey your wise instruction. Truth be told, they are little vipers in Christian diapers! As I heard Vodi Bachum say recently, “God made them small, so they won’t kill you. And he made them cute so you won’t kill them!”

16. So Paul warns his moralistic Jewish friends of the two judgments. The skewed Judgment of man which points to the righteous judgment of God. But then Paul turns to two kinds of false hope.

II. Two kinds of False Hope:

1. After backing us into the proverbial corner with regard to the judgment of all sin, Paul raises a relevant question that demolishes the first false hope. He asks (v. 3)

Do you suppose, O man -you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself - that you will escape the judgment of God?"

2. This is a rhetorical question that requires a negative answer. "Do you suppose... that you will escape the judgment of God?" The answer should be a quiet, humble, repentant. The answer should be "NO." Nevertheless, many people cling to this false hope. When asked why they believe God will allow such a sinner as you to enter the kingdom of heaven, they will say: "Well, I just believe that God will see that I'm a good person at heart and I think he's gracious God and will let me in.

3. O my friend! If this is your eternal hope, you are standing on a rotten plank over an eternal pit of everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. Before you make it to the other side, the support under your feet will shatter and you will fall into the just and righteous wrath of God. The hope you are clinging to is a false hope. God will NOT receive you simply because he is gracious. Grace is NOT his only attribute. I plead with you to abandon such hope while you can.

4. The second false hope is mentioned in the next verse.

Read v. 4

Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

5. Like the ancient Jews, many people presume upon the kindness and patience of God. In other words, they KNOW that God has been good to them. They are alert to the fact that that God has poured out NOT a small amount of kindness, but (as Paul says it) "the riches of his kindness." Such people will freely tell you that God is the source of their success, and blessing, and happiness.

6. Moreover, they may even be sensitive to the fact that they have received far more than they deserve. They know they have sinned in many ways. But God has always been kind to them. He has always been patient with them. And so they falsely conclude, "When I stand

before God in the last day, God will simply overlook my sins as he has always done. His patience and forbearance will usher me right into heaven!

7. But my friend, that too is a false hope. Why? Because, if God is a righteous Judge, he must punish sin. He must punish YOUR sin. There will be a day of reckoning. The fact that God has been kind and patient with you thus far is no promise that he will overlook your sin at the judgment. Indeed, he cannot overlook your sin. To presume on his kindness and patience is a false hope.

8. You may ask, “Well, how should I respond to all of God’s kindness and patience toward me? Paul’s answer is, “Repent!” Repent! His kindness is meant to lead you to repentance, not complacency!

9. In his kindness, and patience he has given you more time to own up to your rebellion against His rule over your life. You know its true. So fall on your face before Him and ask for the very thing you least deserve – forgiveness.

10. On what basis will he forgive you? Not because you’re a good person. Not because he is a kind and gracious God. But because he sent His Son bear the wrath of God for your sin in His body on the cross.

11. *The fact that you feel morally superior to other sinners will not shield you from God’s wrath.*

- A. Will you Not this day do business with God?
- B. Will you not this day give up every false hope?
- C. Will you not fly to Christ who is your risen and living hope?
- D. Now it the time.
- E. Today is the day of salvation.
- F. If you come to Him, he will receive you this very hour.