

Sermon
Principles of God's Judgment Part 1 (1)
Session 23

After reading Paul's severe condemnation of those who have abandoned God and plummeted into the gross sins mentioned in 1:29-31, one naturally wonders about how God deals with the more upright, moral, and religious person who has a sense of right and wrong, and leads an outwardly virtuous life.

Many such ethically upright people would heartily concur with Paul's assessment of the flagrantly immoral people he has just described.

They obviously deserve God's judgment.

Throughout history many pagan individual and societies have held high standards of conduct.

As F.E. Bruce pints out, the Roman philosopher Seneca, a contemporary of Paul, *might have listened to Paul's indictment and said, "yes that is perfectly true of great masses of mankind, and I concur in the judgment which you pass on them, but there are others, of course, like myself, who deplore these tendencies as much as you do"*

Paul imagines someone intervening in terms like these, and he addresses the supposed objector.
How apt this reply would have been to a man like Seneca!

For Seneca could write so effectively on the good life that Christian writers of later days were prone to call him "our own Seneca"

Not only did he exalt the great moral virtues; he exposed hypocrisy, he preached the equality of all men, he acknowledged the pervasive character of evil, he practiced and inculcated daily self-examination. He ridiculed vulgar idolatry, he assumed the role of a moral guide.

But too often he tolerated within himself vices not so different from those which he condemned in others, the most flagrant instance being his connivance at Nero's murder of his mother Agrippina.

Most Jews of Paul's day believed in the idea that performing certain moral and religious works produced righteousness. Specifically, they could earn God's special favor and therefore eternal life by keeping the Mosaic Law, and the traditions of the rabbis.

Many even believed that if they failed in the works effort, they might forfeit some earthly reward but were still exempt from God's judgment simply because they were Jews. God's chosen people.

They were firmly convinced that God would judge and condemn pagan Gentiles because of their idolatry and immorality but that no Jew would ever experience such condemnation.

They loved to repeat such sayings as, "God loves Israel alone of all the nations" and "God will judge the Gentiles with one measure and the Jews with another."

Some taught that Abraham sat outside the gates of hell in order to prevent even the most wicked Jew from entering.

In his dialogue with Trypho, the second century Christian Justin Martyr reports his Jewish opponent as saying, "*They who are the seed of Abraham according to the flesh shall in any case, even if they be sinners and unbelieving and disobedient towards God, share in the eternal kingdom.*"

Even the unregenerate have the basic knowledge of good and evil built into them and into society. Consequently, many people today recognize and seek to uphold the moral standards of Scripture and profess to be Christians. But also like Seneca, because they are not true believers in God, they lack the spiritual resources to maintain the divine morality in their lives and are unable to restrain their sinfulness.

They trust in their baptism, in their church membership, in their being born into a Christian family, in the sacraments, in high ethical standards, in orthodox doctrine, or in any number of other outward ideas, relationships, or ceremonies for spiritual and even eternal safety.

But no one can understand or appropriate salvation apart from recognizing that he stands guilty and condemned before God, totally unable to bring himself up to God's standard of righteousness.

No one is exempt.

The outwardly moral person who is friendly and charitable but self-satisfied, is in fact usually harder to reach with the gospel than the reprobate who has hit bottom, recognized his own sin, and has given up hope.

Therefore, after showing the immoral pagan his lostness apart from Christ, Paul proceeds with great force and clarity to show the moralist that, before God, he is equally guilty and condemned.

And in doing so he presents six principles by which God judges sinful men.

Knowledge (V-1)
Truth (V-2-3)
Guilt (V-4-5)
Deeds (V-6-10)
Impartiality (V-11-15)
And motive (V-16)

We will take these one at a time;

KNOWLEDGE Romans 2:1

Romans 2:1 (NASB)

¹ Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.

Therefore refers to what Paul has just said in the last half of chapter 1, and specifically to the introductory statement:

Romans 1:18-19 (NASB)

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who

suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

¹⁹ *because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.*

Addressing the new group of moral people the apostle says, *“you are also without excuse, every man of you who passes judgment”*

It becomes clear in verse 17, he was speaking primarily to Jews, who characteristically passed judgment on Gentiles, thinking them to be spiritually inferior and even beyond the interest of God’s mercy and care.

The phrase, *“every man of you”* encompasses all moralists, including professing Christians, who think they are exempt from God’s judgment because they have not sunk into the pagan, immoral extremes Paul has just mentioned.

Paul’s initial argument is simple.

In that you judge another, he points out, **you condemn yourself,** because you obviously have a criterion by which to judge, meaning that you know the truth about what is right and wrong before God.

Even the Gentiles know the basic truth of God’s eternal power and divine nature through natural revelation, they also have a sense of right and wrong by conscience.

The Jew, however not only had both of those means of knowing God’s truth but also had the great advantage of having received His special revelation through Scripture.

Romans 3:1-2 (NASB)

¹ *Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision?*

² *Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.*

Not only that, but almost all Jews of Paul’s day would have known something of Jesus Christ and of His teaching and claims even though they would not have believed He was the promised Messiah.

Such knowledge would have made them still more inexcusable, in that their greater knowledge of God’s truth would have made them more accountable to it.

Hebrews 10:26-29 (NASB)

²⁶ *For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,*

²⁷ *but a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES.*

²⁸ *Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.*

²⁹ *How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?*

If relatively unenlightened pagans know basic truths about God and realize they deserve His punishment, Paul was saying, how much more should Jews?

The same principle applies to Christians, both nominal and true.

Because they have a greater knowledge of God’s truth they are more accountable to it and more inexcusable when they self-righteously judge other by it.

James gave a special warning to those who aspire to be Christian teachers, reminding them that, because of their greater knowledge of God's truth, they will be judged more strictly by Him.

James 3:1 (NASB)

¹ *Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.*

But notice here that it was not simply that those who are judgmental are wrong in assessing the moral standing of others but that they also are wrong in assessing their own moral standing.

Romans 2:1c (NASB)

¹ *for you who judge practice the same things.*

The self-righteous make two grave errors:

They underestimate the height of God's standard of righteousness, which encompasses the inner as well as the outer life (the theme of the Sermon on the Mount).

And they underestimate the depth of their own sin.

It is a universal temptation to exaggerate the faults of others while minimizing one's own, to notice a small speck in someone's eye but not the log in one's own eye (Matt 7:1-3)

TRUTH

Roman 2:2-3

Romans 2:2-3 (NASB)

² *And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things.*

³ *But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God?*

The word **know** translates *oida*, which carries the idea of awareness of that which is commonly known and obvious. As Paul has already pointed out, even pagan Gentiles, acknowledge that, "**those who practice such things are worthy of death.**"

So if that is true then the Jews also know that there is judgment for living and practicing these sins.

Everything God does is by nature, right and according to the truth.

Paul says,

Romans 3:4b (NASB)

⁴ *let God be found true, though every man be found a liar,*

Romans 9:14b (NASB)

¹⁴ *There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!*

God is not capable of doing that which is not right or saying that which is not true.

There is always distortion in human perception, but never any in God's

Men are so used to God's blessings and mercy that they take them for granted, not realizing that they receive those things purely because of God's longsuffering and grace.

God would be perfectly just to blot out any person or all persons.

But human nature trades on God's grace, believing that everything will work out all right in the end because God is too good and merciful to send anyone to hell.

Someone has said that there is a small still voice in each of us that constantly convinces us that in the end it's going to be OK. That little voice speak from a person's fallen nature, which constantly seeks to justify itself.

Paul however warns against such false confidence.

Although he was conscious of no specific unconfessed sin in his life, even he knew better than to rely on his imperfect human judgment, declaring;

1 Corinthians 4:3-4 (NASB)

3 But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself.

4 For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord.

He knew that every persons discernment is hopelessly distorted and cannot make a proper evaluation even of his own spiritual health much less of that of anyone else.

So we must be careful to not be passing judgment on others before the time. What time? the coming of the Lord.

1 Corinthians 4:5c (NASB)

5 and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

Men's judgment never squares completely with the truth, because he never know the complete truth.

Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse gives a contemporary and forceful paraphrase of this verse (3)

"you dummy, do you really figure that you have doped out an angle that will let you go up against God and get away with it? You don't have a ghost of a chance" listen my friend, there is no escape. Do you understand there is no escape, ever. And this means you, the respectable person, sitting in judgment upon another fellow creature, and remaining unrepentant yourself"

Hebrews 12:25-29 (NASB)

25 See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven.

26 And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "YET ONCE MORE I WILL SHAKE NOT ONLY THE EARTH, BUT ALSO THE HEAVEN."

27 This expression, "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.

28 Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to

*God an acceptable service with reverence and awe;
29 for our God is a consuming fire.*

The only way any person, no matter how outwardly moral and religious, can escape God's judgment is to receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Receiving in faith the provision He made on the cross by His paying the penalty all deserve.

It has been told that nomadic tribes roamed ancient Russia much as American Indians once roamed North America.

The tribe that controlled the choicest hunting grounds and natural resources was led by an exceptionally strong and wise chief.

He ruled not only because of his superior physical strength but because of his utter fairness and impartiality. When a rash of thefts broke out, he proclaimed that if the thief were caught he would be punished by ten lashes from the tribal whip master.

As the thefts continued, he progressively raised the number of lashes to forty, a punishment that everyone knew he was the only one strong enough to endure.

To their horror, the thief turned out to be the chief's aged mother, and speculation immediately began as to whether or not he would actually sentence her to the announced punishment.

Would he satisfy his love by excusing her or would he satisfy his law by sentencing her to what would surely be her death?

True to his integrity, the chief sentenced his mother to the forty lashes. But true also to his love for his mother, just before the whip came down on her back he surrounded her frail body with his own. Taking upon himself the penalty he had prescribed for her.

In an infinitely greater way, Christ took the penalty of all men's sin upon Himself.