

GOD'S RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT

Romans 2:1-29

Key Verse: 2:5

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.

In Chapter 1, Paul declared that the wrath of God is being revealed to the wickedness of people who suppress the truth of God. They claimed to be wise when they said they were fine without God. But they became fools by exchanging the blessings of God for things that hurt themselves and their families. Paul ended the passage with a list of sins that people routinely commit and encourage others to do the same. Now after reading the list of sins, some people might say, "Well, I'm glad I'm better than those people -- how terrible they are! They deserve God's punishment for sure." But in today's passage, Paul says God's wrath are also on those who judge others. Let us think about why and how we can live a life of faith in God that brings glory and honor to him.

I. GOD DOES NOT SHOW FAVORITISM (1-16)

If you are employed by a company or organization, you are familiar with performance evaluations. Your boss goes over your work record and evaluate your performance. He or she usually uses the performance review in deciding your employment status including promotions. Such evaluation is often relative, meaning, your performance is compared with those of other employees. If you have a glowing evaluation, you may feel elated. If you are a proud person, you may also begin to look down on others who perform poorly. In this passage, Paul teaches us that God's evaluation of us is not based on some relative human standard, but on his righteous standard.

First, only God can judge (1-3). Look at verses 1-3. *You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment?* Some people say, "I am pretty good. I am better than most people. At least I am not like those thieves, murders, and adulterers. They deserve God's punishment!" But Paul says that those who judge others are condemning themselves, because they are also sinners. It is because, though they may look good outwardly, they commit the same sins in their minds. No one has the right to judge others, because everyone is a sinner. One time, Jesus was studying God's word with a group of people in the temple courts early in the morning when some Jewish leaders brought a woman caught in the act of adultery. In an attempt to trap Jesus, they asked him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" What did Jesus say to them? He said, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at

her” (Jn 8:7) At this, they began to go away one at a time, the older ones first. No one was without sin.

Jesus also said in Matthew 7: “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?” (Mt 7:1-3) Still some people judge others instead of repenting their own sins. Why? Judging others make them feel better. The problem is that we often use the double standard when we judge others. We are strict to others' faults while we are very generous to our own sins. Paul asks, “... do you think you will escape God's judgment?” If we judge others, it shows that we can tell right from wrong. And then, we do the same things! We cannot escape God's judgment by judging others. God is a righteous judge. We cannot fool him.

Second, do not show contempt for God's patience (4-5). Some people judge others to make themselves feel better. Others show contempt for the patience of God. Look at verses 4-5. *Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance? 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.* How do people show contempt for the riches of God's kindness, tolerance and patience? A young man may commit a sin at night. He feels guilty about it. But the next morning, he feels okay, because God has not punished him immediately for his sin. So he might say, “Look at me. I am fine. What I did last night is no big deal.” Paul says that people who do this are actually showing contempt for God's patience. God does not always punish us according to a cause and effect principle. He does not strike us with a bolt of lightning whenever we do something wrong before him. So we may misconstrue his silence as his tacit approval of what we are doing. But this is wrong. The purpose of the riches of God's kindness, tolerance and patience is to lead us to repent and turn to him. When we insist on our stubbornness, we are storing up wrath against ourselves for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed (5). We must realize that God wants us to repent our sins. God is merciful and patient, waiting for a long time for us to repent. The problem is that it is so much easier to have a stubborn heart than a repentant one. We must pray that the Holy Spirit may help us to have a repentant heart.

Third, each according to what he has done (6-11). When God's righteous judgment is revealed, what will be his just and impartial standard? Let us read verses 6-11. *God “will give to each person according to what he has done.” To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism.*

The Bible declares that the Day of Judgment is coming! On that day, God will separate the people “as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats” (Mt 25:32). Every person will be held accountable to what he or she has done before God. God’s judgment standard is not arbitrary. God will judge each person according to what he has done (6). His judgment is righteous and impartial.

In verses 7-8, Paul teaches us clearly that they are two different life directions we can follow in this world that reveal our relationship with God. The first way to persistently seek glory, honor and immortality in God. This is living a life of faith in God. It is “doing good” by doing what God wants us to do. When we do this, God will give us eternal life in the kingdom of God. He will give us glory, honor and peace. We have to endure hardship to live a life of faith in this unbelieving world, but God will reward us richly on the Day of Judgment.

The second way of life to “do evil” before God. It is self-seeking. It is rejecting the truth of God, that is, the word of God. It is a life that ignores God and his word. People do evil when they reject God’s word and follow their sinful nature. There will be wrath and anger for them on the Day of Judgment. *There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.* God does not show favoritism.

Notice that God will judge us based on what we have done—either doing good or doing evil. God saves us by faith in Jesus. But it is not just the words we say, but the actions that prove our faith. What we do will matter in the end. Now, how about the sinful acts done by men and women of faith? After all, Abraham wasn’t perfect. David committed an adultery and a murder. And we know that we haven’t been perfect since we became Christians. We continue to sin because of the sinful body we have. So how can anyone be saved from sin and death? Actually, no one can be saved on his or her own merit. We are saved only by the grace of God when we have faith in Jesus. That is what Paul teaches us in verse 16. In the end, Jesus is the ultimate standard for God’s judgment.

Fourth, hearing versus obeying the law (12-16). So we know that God does not show favoritism (11). Then how does God judge the Jews (those who have the Bible) and the Gentiles (those who do not have the Bible) without showing favoritism? Look at verses 12-15. *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. 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. (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, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.)*

The Jews (those who have the word of God and all who sin under the law) will be judged by the law (12). The answer to the question “How can a Jew be saved?” is this: “By obeying the law of God perfectly!” There are 613 commandments from the books of

Torah--365 don't's and 248 do's. The problem is that no one is able to keep all these commandments perfectly. Just hearing about the words of God or knowing about them is not enough. What counts is obeying the commandments. Only those who obey the law will be declared righteous by God (13).

How about the Gentiles (those who sin apart from the law)? Paul says that they will perish apart from the law (12). They will be judged by their consciences as the requirements of the law are written on their hearts (15). Their consciences bear witness and their thoughts also accuse. It seems that the standard of God's judgment is higher for the Jews and those who have the Bible than for the Gentiles. But the point is that the self-seeking Gentiles cannot measure up to God's standard, even with the lower standard. In the end, God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ as the gospel declares (16). Jesus is the perfect standard! That is why we need Jesus as our person Savior!

II. THE JEWS AND THE LAW (17-29)

Paul said earlier that it is not about having the law of God but obeying the law is what matters. He elaborates this point further in this part, using the Jews as a case in point.

First, don't brag about the law; obey the law (17-24). Look at verses 17-22. *Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God; if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth-- you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?*

The Jews were blessed by God. They were given the word of God. They had a relationship with God (17). They were in a position to teach others about God's word (21). But there was a problem with them. Paul asks in verses 23-24. *You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? As it is written: "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."* They had the law and taught it, but they themselves did not obey it. They thought that their privileges as God's people made them exceptions to God's rules. But what matters is not about having the law but obeying it. This applies to us as well. Those who have the word of God are in a position to most effectively suppress the truth. We have the knowledge of God. But if we fail to obey the word of God and never repent before God, we are suppressing the truth. If we are double-minded, then our lives blaspheme God's name among those who don't believe in God.

Second, true circumcision is circumcision of the heart (25-29). The Jews valued circumcision which was a physical mark on their body that separated them from the Gentiles. But St. Paul had a very different take on circumcision. Look at verses 25-29. *Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have*

become as though you had not been circumcised. If those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker. A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God.

The key point here is that true circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code” (29). Several Old Testament Scriptures also urged the chosen people of God to circumcise their hearts. Deuteronomy 10:16 says, “Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer.” Likewise, Christians should not brag about their baptism. We must repent instead and love the Lord! Circumcision literally involves cutting a part of our body. It is painful. Circumcision of the heart also involves pain, as it may involve giving up something we really like because it displeases the Lord. Most of all, true circumcision is by the Spirit. We must pray that God may give us a repentant heart.

In conclusion, our God is a righteous judge. His judgment is just. God does not show favoritism. Those who have the law are condemned because they failed to obey the law. The Gentiles are also condemned because of their sins. Each person will be held accountable on the Day of Judgment. Those who have done good by seeking the Lord will receive God’s reward. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil by rejecting the truth of God. Ultimately, Jesus is the standard of God’s judgment. May God help each of us to stand beside Jesus our Lord and Savior!