

Ministry of Grace Church

Romans 2:1-11 - Sermon Notes



To Judge or Be Judged

Background

We have all experienced a time when, after criticizing someone, we were told, “Christians aren’t supposed to judge others.” The implication is that we are supposed to remain quiet, even when someone is doing something wrong. But these people fail to realize that when they accuse us of being judgmental, they are being judgmental themselves. According to our accusers, we’re supposed to be tolerant of those who are acting contrary to the way God wants people to act. In fact, if you believe the drivel that is spouted by today’s supposed authorities, we should affirm their actions, because we all have the right to live our lives the way we want.

They say, “There is no absolute truth, and the goal in life is self satisfaction.” However, according to God, “His Word is absolute truth, and the ultimate goal in life is not self-satisfaction, but selfless submission - to God.” Unfortunately, we will never be able to persuade them of their error, only God can do that. One day, He will certainly judge sinners, and He will do so based on absolute truth.

Because of our salvation, God has declared all Christians to be righteous and faultless. However, keep in mind that our salvation is a result of God’s goodness, not ours. So, is it wrong for us to judge anyone else? When Jesus was teaching in the Temple, He was accused of having a demon because the people didn’t like what He was teaching. They were judging Him, but He didn’t tell them not to judge. He said,

“Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” (John 7:24)

As Christians, we must point out that which is sin or we are not showing love. For instance, we must tell people that all sexual conduct outside of marriage is sin, that abortion is sin, that homosexuality is sin, and so on. So yes, Christians can, and indeed must judge, but we are not to judge hypocritically. We should judge using righteous judgment! And judge with gentleness and meekness, with boldness and courage.

Now, to be fair, this “no judging” accusation of the secular humanists may have originated from a common misunderstanding of our current passage in the book of Romans. Let’s see what it really says.

Romans 2:1-2

Therefore you are without excuse, O man, everyone who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things.

The root word for both “passes judgment” and “judge” is the same. It means “to decide between good and evil.” Here it is used in such a way as to imply condemnation. That’s how we tend to judge other people, and it’s not always based on fact but on emotion.

But why would Paul say that anyone who critically judges another is inexcusable? When we criticize others for certain sinful practices, we are condemning ourselves because we do the same things. Paul is exposing a fact of human nature of which we are all guilty. The things that we are the harshest in condemning others about are the very things that we are guilty of doing ourselves.

A few verses ago, Paul rattled off a whole long list of sins that come from our sin nature. But now he says, “don’t be too critical of others who do one or two of these things because they are the very things that you are guilty of.” It’s sort of like that expression, “When you point a finger at someone else, there are three other fingers pointing back at you.”

In this passage, Paul says “we know the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things.” What He is saying is that God’s condemning judgment (unlike man’s condemning judgment) is according to truth. Those who sin against God will be judged some day, and their judgment and subsequent condemnation will not be based on God’s emotion, it will be based on the truth of their sins.

Now, because many of these Roman Christians were brought up in the Jewish tradition, they have always known that the judgment of God is according to truth. Throughout the Old Testament we see examples of God judging sinners for their sins, and we see that such judgment is always according to truth. This is repeatedly portrayed so strongly that it has become a fundamental doctrine of the Jewish faith.

There is certainty in God’s judgment and no one who sins against God will get away with it. He will truly judge everyone’s sin, if not in this life, then certainly at the Great White Throne where all sinners will appear at the end of life. Thanks be to Jesus Christ whose blood paid the penalty of that judgment on our behalf! Through His sacrifice we are saved from that judgment because our names are written in the Book of Life.

Romans 2:3-4

But do you presume this, O man—who passes judgment on those who practice such things and does the same—that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?

The word “practice” is from *prassō*. As we learned last time, this means “to perform an action continually, repeatedly, or habitually.” It is expressed here as a present participle, indicating current, on-going action. On the other hand, “does” is translated from the Greek verb *poieō*, meaning “to make or do.” It is different from *prassō* in that it implies an occasional action rather than a habitual one. This word is also expressed as a present participle indicating a current, ongoing condition. Therefore, it refers to ongoing occasional action.

Christians in Rome in Paul's day were judgmental of the pagan Romans who constantly engaged in sinful practices while these Jewish Christians were guilty of committing many of these same sins. He is warning them that God will judge sin and sinfulness no matter whether it is an occasional sin or an habitual sin. To God, sin is sin!

Now, he talks about another condition of the human mind. He just showed us that finger pointing is self-condemning because we tend to see in others what we do ourselves. But we also have a tendency to excuse our own actions. After all, we know why we do these things, and we can easily excuse them in our own minds. Besides, we don't do these things very often, and yet we see others doing these things all the time.



Let's not miss the point here. It would be easy to read this passage and say, "We shouldn't care how others live, and we certainly shouldn't be judgmental." But that's not what Paul is saying. He's saying that before we condemn others for their sinful actions, we need to look inwardly and deal with our own sin. When Jesus was confronted by those who wanted to stone a woman caught in the act of adultery, He responded:

He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first. (John 8:7b)

In other words, our tendency to judge others does not absolve us from guilt and the consequences of our own sin; in fact, it increases our own condemnation.

Paul is asking, "*Do you think evil of God's kindness, and His self-restraint, ignoring the fact that God's kindness is what leads you to repentance?*" In other words, "God is very patient and suffers the pain of our sin against Him. And because He is so kind, instead of squashing us like bugs, He actually leads us to an attitude of repentance!"

The picture is like that of a loving father who, when his son or daughter has done something wrong, takes the time and effort to lovingly explain the effect of their wrongful action so that they realize they have done wrong and tell their father they're sorry, asking for forgiveness. The real beauty of this is the fact that without God's longsuffering and patience and His loving, leading hand, we would not repent. For, as Paul says here, "**the kindness of God leads you to repentance.**"

Our sin nature is ever present, and it is powerful. Without the greater power of God, through His kindness and His willingness to hold back His righteous anger, we wouldn't repent of our sinfulness. And without this repentance we wouldn't be saved from our sins. Praise be to God for His kindness!

All sin is abhorrent to God, and He must exact the payment for sin, which is death. Through His own kindness, however, he draws us to repentance, which is necessary in order to receive the forgiveness of our sins through the blood of His own Son. So, we see that not only does God provide the payment for our sins (for which we have no one to blame but ourselves), but He also draws us to that payment by leading us to repentance.

Romans 2:5-6

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 repay to each according to his works:

Unfortunately, there are many who will refuse to be drawn to repentance because they are too proud and will not submit to the sovereignty of God. For this, Paul now explains what will ultimately happen. He says, "**because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself.**" This wrath will come, "**in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.**" One day, our

loving God will pour out His wrath upon the sinful, unrepentant inhabitants of this earth. And the ultimate result of that wrath will be the casting of those unrepentant souls into the lake of fire.

People who refuse to submit to God's authority are given over to all kinds of sinfulness, as we learned in the previous chapter. They will also receive the judgment for that sinfulness on the Day of Judgment. Only when it is too late will they realize that they were wrong and that they were fighting against the all-powerful Judge of the universe.

The day of wrath and judgment that is talked about here is a reference to the judgment of the unrighteous (the unsaved.) This will occur at the Great White Throne Judgment spoken of in [Revelation 20:12-15](#):

Then I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them, and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Now, for a Greek grammar lesson. The "if" clause in the last verse ([Rev 20:15](#)) is expressed as a first-class condition in the Greek, implying that it is true. So, this could be paraphrased as: And since no one was found having been written in the Book of Life, each was cast into the Lake of Fire. This is part of the evidence that believers will not be at this judgment; only the condemned unsaved will be there.

Notice in this Revelation passage that the dead are judged according to their works. That's exactly what he says here in Romans: (God) [will repay to each according to his works](#).

Those of us who have accepted Jesus Christ as our personal savior and Lord will not appear at the Great White Throne Judgment. Our names are written in the Book of Life, not because of our works, but because of His work on the Cross. That is not to say that our works won't be judged. They will be judged at the Bema Seat (the Judgment Seat of Christ) mentioned in [Romans 14:12](#), [1 Corinthians 3:12](#), and [2 Corinthians 5:10](#), where we will be rewarded for our good works.

Romans 2:7-11

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 anger. There will be affliction and turmoil for every soul of man who works out evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to everyone who works good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God.

In the previous verse Paul told us that the Great Judge "[will repay to each according to his works](#)." Now he tells us what will be handed out to these two contrasting groups of people. First, he talks about those who patiently continue to do good, who are seeking glory, honor and immortality. That pretty much describes a committed Christian, and Paul tells us what they will get - [eternal life](#). Next, he tells us what the other group of people will get.

Remember that Paul is contrasting the righteous and the wicked. He is not giving a treatise on faith versus works (he will get into that later in the letter.) The point he is making is that the saved will get eternal life, while the wicked, unrighteous ones will get something entirely different. He says, "[but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness ...](#)" Those who are self-seeking and not persuaded by the truth will receive the anger and wrath of God.

Do you see the attitude of the unbeliever here? Those who reject the good news of Christ's death on the cross in payment for their sins, refuse to believe. They refuse to be persuaded that they are sinners and need salvation. Why? Because they are self seeking and unwilling to submit themselves to the truth and to the God of truth. Remember what Paul said in the previous chapter of this letter?

For even though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, (Romans 1:21-22)

And what will these self-serving fools receive when they stand before the God of creation? The wrath and anger of the Almighty, Holy, Righteous GOD who they deny! He now reiterates these points, as if to make a clear statement that there is a distinct difference between what will happen to the unrighteous and what will happen to the righteous.

Tribulation and anguish, according to Paul, are what comes to him who “works out evil” during his life here on earth. The implication is that the worthless actions of the unrighteous are not just occasional during their lives; rather these selfish acts of unrighteousness are continual until their lives are ended. It may seem harshly judgmental to think of the unsaved as never doing anything good. However, from God's perspective “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” That is to say, all of the deeds of the unsaved are worthless.

Paul now makes a very clear point to the Roman Christians, most of whom were converted Jews. They had a tendency to be proud of their Jewish heritage and of their faith. He tells them that this condemnation will come on Jews and Gentiles alike. In fact, the judgment will come on the Jews first (or primarily) then on the Gentiles as well. This is a strong condemnation regarding their pride, which is not a godly trait.

Paul then changes his focus and talks about, “everyone who works good,” The implication is that these are people who are continually laboring to do good. Doing what is right is not something that comes naturally to any of us because of the sin nature that we all inherited from Adam. It is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that we are even capable of doing anything truly good. And, as we all know, it takes effort to continue to do good, especially when it seems that we continually get taken advantage of when we do.

However, there is a beautiful promise to all Christians here. Paul tells us that those of us who continue to labor at doing good, in spite of what the world does to us, will receive **glory, honor and peace** from the great Judge when we stand face to face with Him.

But - we are not to go through this life seeking to gain glory for ourselves, and we should not be seeking our own honor. If we are seeking to bring honor and glory to God through our good works, He will one day give us both honor and glory. And, on top of it all, He will give us peace. The unrighteous will not have peace. They will have tribulation and anguish, and they will be separated from the presence of God for all of eternity.

This is one of those verses that I think we all should commit to memory for those times when we get tired of trying to do what God wants us to do; when we feel like it's just no use; when life seems to be going downhill with no end in sight. Remember, this promise is not to just anyone! It only applies to those who have been declared righteous by God. That is, it only applies to those who have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. And, according to Paul in the book of Ephesians, the whole reason for us being saved is so we can do good works for God:

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10)

We look at people and judge them by their appearance, but God judges all men by their heart. Let me give you an example. Samuel the prophet was sent by God to anoint the next king of Israel. When he first saw the eldest son of Jesse, he was sure that this was the one God had chosen, but he was told otherwise:

But Yahweh said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but Yahweh looks at the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7)

That’s exactly what Paul is saying here in Romans. God will judge us all based on the righteousness that we possess no matter how hard we try to impress Him with our good works. We can go to Church every Sunday, read our Bible, and pray daily. We can give to the poor and even work for a poor Christian organization and look at our low wage as “a ministry for God.” But if we have not been declared righteous in God’s Book of Life then we will be judged with all the other unrighteous ones at the Great White Throne judgment. If, on the other hand, we have recognized our sinfulness and we have humbled ourselves before God, accepting the blood of Christ as payment for our sins, then God declares us to be righteous, and we will not appear at the Great White Throne judgment. Instead, we will appear at the Bema Seat judgment where we will receive rewards for the good works we have done.

One final note: the works that we get rewarded for may not be the works that we expect to get rewarded for. Only those things which are done for Him, that is, to give Him glory, will be rewarded. These things that we do for ourselves (even if we claim that they are for Him) will not result in rewards. It’s sort of a catch-22. If we do any deed for the purpose of getting rewarded for it, we won’t get a reward for it. On the other hand, the selfless things that we do in obedience to God, strictly for His glory, because He is deserving, these are what will result in rewards for us.

So What?

The next time you see someone acting in a way that you know is wrong, remember that God is the Judge of all mankind, and He will execute His judgment according to truth, not according to appearance. Let’s commit to each other that we will pay close attention to what Paul is teaching us and ask God to forgive us when we are judgmental of others. While we’re at it let’s thank God that Jesus paid the penalty of our judgment!

Just because we have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior doesn’t mean that we don’t have to be actively doing godly works. We all need to be busy building up the body of Christ, doing the deeds He has called us to do. So – let’s get to work for Him!

Also, we Christians need to be very careful that we don’t get prideful in our salvation. After all, we’re not saved because of anything that we did. Our salvation is because of what God has done for us. After all, without His gift of grace, none of us would be saved. When we become prideful in our salvation we are taking the credit away from Him, and it is credit that only He deserves! Let’s humble ourselves and praise **Him** for what **He** has done!

Here's a final parting thought. If you want to bless God, then serve Him humbly and faithfully. And - if you want God to bless you, then serve Him humbly and faithfully.

Let’s pray.