

GOD'S RIGHTEOUS JUDGEMENT

Romans 2:1-16 (Key verse: 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.”

The message is based on the book of Romans chapter 2 verses 1 to 16. Key verse is verse 5 and it reads: 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 last week’s message we learned about the wrath of God, which is being revealed against all the godlessness and wickedness of people who suppress the truth by their wickedness. We learned about how these individuals, although knowing God, they did not glorify or give thanks to Him so that God gave them over to worshipping idols, perverting sexuality and being filled with all kinds of wickedness: envy, murder, deceit, malice and gossips who are God hating. This kind of people are what we call public sinners, those whose sins are utterly on display for all to see. We look at them and think, “How could they do such and such?”

In today’s passage we are going to learn about those individuals whose sins are not so public. Those that have a certain apparent moral rectitude- they live a life that is relatively moral in relation to the group we learned about last week. They are the moralists, they do their best to live a life that is healthy, beneficial and fulfilling as far as this world is concerned: they are friendly, they smile and wave when you cut them in traffic. They have nice families, they work hard, they make the best of their marriages, they provide for their children, raise them in a healthy manner, they pay their taxes, and they even give to the poor—they are morally upright. Because of that, they are under the illusion that they are safe from the wrath of God.

This is how Paul describes them in verse 1: You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. Because they think they are safe from the wrath of God, they go around judging those people who are seemingly immoral in relation to them. We can see from Paul’s description of them that their judgement is not righteous. They know what is right, and with that knowledge, they condemn themselves because they hypocritically judge other. They are what Jesus described in Matthew 7:3-5, when He said: 3 “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? 4 How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.” This is the problem with these people, they are self-righteous and hypocrites and thus their judgement cannot be righteous. This is because they use a morally relativistic standard to judge. This is the stand we use to compare ourselves to others. This happens when we emphasize the things we do physically and minimize the things we think and feel internally, which leads us to diminish our own sin and start thinking “we are not that bad”. For example, most of us would shun the murderer and even demand for his/her arrest, and yet when someone cuts us off in traffic, we wish that their wheel would come off, right! We just want them to feel something bad...to stick it to them.

This is the deception, the illusion that results when people use a morally relativistic standard to determine whether they are righteous or not, and therefore safe from the wrath of God, and this is not how God looks at people.

Let’s look at verse 2: 2 Now we know that God’s judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. This is the difference between the humanistic judgement and the judgement of God. Humans judge based on a relativistic standard and God judges according to the truth. God is light and in Him there is no darkness. He is the Creator of the heavens and the earth and in that capacity, He is alone qualified to judge. Amen! He provides the standard of what is right and what is wrong, He is the standard. Amen! Not only so, God is also omniscient, He knows all things, He knows the thoughts of men and what goes on in their hearts. That is why His judgement is righteous, He knows the truth, He knows all of the truth. Remember when Samuel was sent to anoint David, he was concerned that God was letting off all the apparently good options for a king. Yet God said to him: The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. This is God’s righteous judgement: it is most pure, most wise and most independent judgement, without error.

What then should we think considering this righteous judgement of God? Let's look at verses 3 and 4: **3 So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? 4 Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?** Firstly, Paul says that these people should be terrified, that if with their perverse standard, they are willing and are able to judge others, they should certainly not hope to escape the righteous judgement of God. They should instead honour and praise God for His patience, forbearance and kindness, and realise that the only reason why God has not exacted His wrath upon them is because He wants them to repent and be truly saved from His wrath. It is such a difficult task to save people who do not think that they need saving. Jesus taught in the beatitudes: **Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.** It is because of a distorted self-evaluation that anyone would consider themselves rich in spirit and thus far from the wrath of God. Sometimes we even hear some people say, "If God is good, then He would get rid of all the evil in the world." They say this because they consider themselves be good and that they will survive when the world gets purged of evil. And yet we answer them, "If God got rid of all the evil in the world today, there would be no one left tomorrow, because everyone is the evil in the world." Amen!?! Trying to save such people is like trying to warn a blind and deaf man that there is a bottomless pit ahead and that he should turn to the right or to the left. You're telling him about the danger, but he can neither hear you nor see it.

Let's look at verse 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.** The second thing we should consider as we contemplate the righteous judgement of God is this: His judgement is sure and certain. **It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgement.** Inevitably, and inexorably we will find ourselves before the judgement seat of God. If we are under some illusion that we are safe from His wrath, as the people described, we will realise on that day that everything we have ever done we did in a sinful manner. And because of that, we would have accumulated wrath against ourselves for the day of judgement. The continuous rejection of God's salvation will increase the offense of unbelievers on the day of judgement, so that anyone who thought they did not need to be saved, will be judged more severely than those who merely lived an utterly immoral life without any contemplation of self-righteousness. This is the danger of self-righteousness, of human centred standard of judgement, it leads to the accumulating of wrath on the day of judgement, so that the self-righteous is worse than a public sinner. Paul teaches here, that there are degrees or levels of punishment in hell. The condemned will not be punished equally, they will receive punishment according to what they have done, and clearly the self-righteous will receive more.

We can see this explained in the execution of God's judgement in verses 6 to 10: **6 God "will repay each person according to what they have done." [a] 7 To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. 8 But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. 9 There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; 10 but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.** Paul here describes the execution of the judgement of God; how He will deal with the wicked and the righteous. He will repay each person according to what they have done. He says about the righteous and the redeemed: there will be eternal life for those who persistently seek glory, honor and immortality. There will be glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good. This may sound like some sort of a salvation on the basis of works, but rest assured, scripture everywhere teaches that salvation is by faith in Christ. The deeds being described here: the seeking of glory, honor and immortality are not the basis of salvation but the evidence of it. The reasons why Paul uses this language here, is to show that although salvation is by faith, judgement is by works. Consider the final judgement in Revelation 20:12-15: **12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. 13 And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. 14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.** There is judgement here against those that are not found in the book of life, in fact they are judged according to what they have done, while those in the book of life receive no judgement.

This is to emphasize the danger of ignoring the righteous judgement of God while we focus on condemning the sins of others, thinking that we ourselves are right with God when we are not.

As Christians, we have been empowered by the Holy Spirit to live a life that is exemplary in this world; to put on display the righteousness of God in those who are being saved. We are accordingly called to live a life of a high moral standard. We strive to be morally upright and to live righteously before God. This presents a temptation to become judgemental towards others whom we think are not striving as much as we are. Accordingly, we may find ourselves hypocritically presenting our moral righteousness as the standard to which others should adhere, forgetting that we are ourselves not perfect. The sobering truth about the righteousness of God, as presented by Paul, in this passage should truly humiliate us, and have us consider the truth that God knows our inner most thoughts, He knows that filthy person that we are in our most private of moments. He knows what we struggle with, so that there is no need for us or anyone to pretend to be something that they are not and thereby possibly accumulating wrath for ourselves. In light of this, we should seek to exercise gentleness and love towards others, knowing that we are dealing with a standard of righteousness that is above all of us. We should call each other to such a standard, but it should be with an attitude that knows that the standard belongs to God and we are all striving after it. It does not mean we should not call others to repentance in light of God's truth. It simply means that we shouldn't call them to our own personal hypocritical standards. Amen!

Verses 11 to 16 demonstrates that the righteous standard of God's judgement is the law of God. The ten commandments. God gave the Jews various laws, including ceremonial and civil laws, both of which were fulfilled in Christ and no one is required to practice. However, the ten commandments are a standard of righteousness to which God will hold all people on the day of judgement. The Jews, having the law, will not be declared righteous in God's sight by their mere possession of the law, and the Gentiles will not be declared righteous just because they do not have the law. Paul says that the Gentiles show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts and that their consciences bear witness. Both the Jews and the Gentiles will be judged according to the standard of the law of God, which is either, clearly revealed in written code to the Jews or impressed upon the heart by the consciences of the Gentiles when they innately come to know the requirements of the righteous judgement of God. That is how it will be on that day, God will not show favouritism. He will not be harsh upon the Jews for having the law or lenient upon the Gentiles who do not have the law, God has adequately revealed His standard to both.

In conclusion,

Paul is here addressing those people who are seemingly morally upright and are convinced that they are safe from the wrath of God. We learned that these people think this way because they use a relativistic moral standard, they compare themselves to other people instead of using the moral standard of God, which is absolute and based upon the truth. As a result of using this false standard, these people live their lives under the pretence or deception of being right with God. They undermine their own sin while emphasizing others', so they can feel good about themselves. Accordingly, they will be dumbfounded on the day of judgement when they learn that they have been living sinfully and heaping up wrath against themselves for that day. Paul wants us, as the readers, to have a true sense of appreciation for our sinfulness, to be honest with ourselves with regards to our sins, so that we will not tarry in coming to Christ in repentance and seeking mercy from God while it may be found. Christianity is a religion that foundationally expresses judgement. Calling someone to repentance is essentially judging them. The idea is not that we shouldn't judge. We don't agree with those people who suddenly agree with the scripture when it says, "Judge not" while they ignore everything else. The idea is that when we call people to repentance and faith, we do not call them to our own personal moral standards, but to the moral standard of God so that even as we exercise judgement, the judgement is the righteous judgement of God and not our own deception. Amen!