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Romans 2:1-3 “Those Who Judge Others”

Intro. The first chapter proves the guilt of the ungodly, pagan world. Even if they do not have a Bible, they are without excuse, for they have nature and conscience. Many non-Christians are obviously sinful and worthy of judgment. They know that sin brings death, but they go ahead and sin and even congratulate others who sin (v.32).

Most Jews would have applauded Paul’s condemnation of the pagan Gentiles in Romans 1. They would have been in the “Amen” corner shouting “Amen” to what Paul said in the last part of chapter 1. They would have considered themselves morally superior, for they were not anything like the idol worshipping Gentiles. As a result, such people did not see themselves as needing a Savior.

Likewise, many people today who view themselves as religious or morally upright do not feel the need for a Savior. Many religious people assume that because they were baptized as an infant, confirmed at age 12, attend church, partake of the sacraments, & live a moral life that they are OK with God. Then there are some non-church-going people who feel like they live good, moral lives. They feel they are as good as the church-going Christians they know. They can name quite a few sins that they feel they have never committed. Thus, they do not feel a need to go to church, and they feel they do not need a Savior. Most people would say, “I’m a good person.” Quite a few believe they do not need to be saved by Jesus, or any other way of salvation. They are counting on their own righteousness to get them into heaven. They feel they are too good to be sent to hell.

Are they right? I suggest that you had better make sure you are right about how to enter heaven and have eternal life. Eternity is too long to be wrong. Heb. 9:27 says, “it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.” You must face God some day; you cannot escape it. Heb. 10:31 warns, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” And if you have some idea that you will enter heaven and escape hell without Jesus Christ, then you especially need to listen this morning.

So the target audience of my text today is the morally upright person who is trusting in their moral goodness to make them acceptable to God. Do they need a Savior, or is their human goodness & righteousness good enough? Well here in chapter 2 Paul sets out to prove that even the religious, morally upright Jew needs a God-kind-of-righteousness. They too are sinners. And any other person’s religion or morality is inadequate as well. And he proves his point by a carefully crafted series of arguments.

I want to deal with this text by asking a series of questions:

I. DO YOU JUDGE OTHERS?

This issue is clearly addressed in vv.1-3. For example, he says in v.1, “Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge....” One common practice among those who view themselves as religious and morally upright is that they judge & condemn those who do not measure up to their moral or religious standards. In fact, the repeated use of the present tense here

vv.1 & 3 means that Paul has in mind those who have a habit of judging others. Don't we all know people who are constantly judging or criticizing people?

Even though there were some among the Gentiles that sought wisdom & virtue, I believe that Paul is mainly dealing with the Jew here in chapter 2. One reason I say this is because he is describing the Jewish attitude toward Gentiles here. In the middle of this verse Paul uses the word "another", which in the Greek means "another of a different kind." A typical Jew would consider the Gentile to be another of a different kind indeed, physically, morally, and spiritually. Furthermore, the Jew's privileges and superior morality tended to make him a critic of the Gentile pagan. He would condemn in no uncertain terms those who do such things as described in chapter 1.

Now Paul is setting up his fellow Jews. On the one hand, they universally condemned Gentile wickedness and approved of divine wrath against such wickedness. Thus, they know right from wrong, and that wrong must be punished.

What about you? Haven't you ever criticized or judged someone? Of course you have. In doing so, you are admitting that there is right and wrong, and some things are wrong and are deserving of judgment.

Now this leads to my next question. If you sit in judgment upon others:

II. DO YOU THINK *YOU*¹ ARE EXEMPT FROM THE JUDGMENT OF GOD?

A person who sets himself up as morally superior and a judge of others usually feels that they will escape the judgment of God, and go right on in to heaven. They feel God's judgment is for those who are morally inferior. This can create a false sense of security. Notice what Paul says about that in v.3, "And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?" The word "think" (*logizomai*) means "to consider, estimate, calculate." You have thought about it; you have added things up in your mind, and you have concluded that you will escape any judgment from God that will lead to condemnation.

How did the typical Jew come up with such an idea? Well they thought that they would escape the judgment of God since they were Abraham's descendents and God's chosen people. They believed they were under a national salvation. They also believed they were exempt because they considered themselves to be morally superior. They did not worship idols, or engage in gross immorality. Furthermore, it's a fatal human tendency to exaggerate the faults of others and minimize our own. Someone said, "Faults are like headlights on a car—those of others seem more glaring than our own." Finally, we all tend to exonerate ourselves. We either deny we have done wrong, or we offer excuses for the wrong we have done.

Here in this text Paul gives several reasons why being a judge of others does not exempt you from God's judgment. First:

A. You Practice Many of the Same Sins – Paul says in the last of v.1, "in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things." Even the finest critic has been guilty in some degree of the thing he has judged in another. We could review the list of sins found in 1:29-31 and see that professing Christians, as well as Jews, are guilty of many of these social and spiritual sins! (Read over & comment on some). When you judge others you had better be careful, for soon or later people will see your hypocrisy. Like many have said, when

¹ The second use of the pronoun "you" in v.3 is emphatic.

you point your finger at someone else, you have 3 fingers pointing back at you! The problem is that too often people are blind to their own sin & hypocrisy.

A recent study sought to answer the question, “Were religious conservatives griping about hyper-violent and sexual R-rated movies ... but going to see them anyway?” It seems the answer to that question is yes in many cases. For example, 25 percent of the “very religious” have seen movies rated R for their sexual content, compared to 33 percent of the “nonreligious.”²

B. You are Making a Foolish Comparison - So what if you are better than someone else morally? That other person isn't the standard of conduct that you are supposed to compare yourself to. The true standard is Jesus Christ and the Word of God. If you compare your life to Jesus Christ you will realize how far short of God's righteousness you really are. If you compare your life to the high moral standards of the Word of God, you will have to humbly acknowledge that you fall short. The Word of God is like a mirror; it helps you see the wrongs in your life. But if you compare yourself to the average sinner, you will probably feel morally superior.

Imagine 2 men in a competition to get to the moon, which is 186,000 miles away. One climbs Mount Everest while the other climbs a small hill behind his house. The one on Mt. Everest has achieved a height of over 29,000 feet, and he laughs at the puny progress of the other. He thinks he is so much better than the other. So it is with human judgment. But both are still very far from the moon. The one on Mt. Everest may be over 5 miles high, but he is still far short of 186,000 miles! Even so, from the point of view of God, all people fall far short of God's standard of righteousness.

C. You Are Guilty of Self-Righteousness – What was the primary sin of Lucifer that led to others sins, & his expulsion from heaven? It was pride. Well when we judge others, when we put others down, we build ourselves up. In comparison to the person we condemn, we see ourselves as far better. People judge others to achieve a feeling of superiority, and that leads to prideful self-righteousness, which is a great sin in the eyes of God. Who was it that was farthest from the kingdom of heaven? Was it the tax collectors & sinners of Jesus day? No, it was the self-righteous Pharisees. They were the ones who were in the habit of judging others.

Based on these reasons, Paul affirms that there will be no escape from facing the judgment of God! It matters not how religious you are or how morally upright you think you are. Now I want to prepare you for what you could face at the judgment bar of God. I have another question for you:

III. DO YOU THINK YOU CAN DEFEND YOURSELF AT GOD'S JUDGMENT?

If you think that way, notice what Paul says in v.2, “But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things.” The word rendered “we know” means to know as a matter of principle. The “we” likely means Paul and his fellow Jews. Father Abraham stated this belief in Gen. 18:25, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” Truth does not denote the standard of judgment, but the method of judging. His judgment will be absolutely true and accurate according to the facts of each case.

We must get out of our minds any conception that the judgment of God is going to be similar to the way we judge ourselves. We see ourselves through the distorted mirror of our own

² The study was co-sponsored by Variety and MarketCast, reported in ChristianityTodayMovies.com, 7/29/05 [Illus.#C-1368].

imagination. We compare ourselves to others and think that we are better than average. Sometimes we can fool people, and our sin can go undetected.

However, as we have seen, God's judgment is according to truth. His judgment is not flawed or distorted. He does not judge based on outward appearance, but He knows the true condition of the heart. 1 Samuel 16:7 says, "For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." Furthermore, as we have already discussed, you can't hide or cover up your sin. Paul says in Romans 2:16, "God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ..." Heb. 4:13 says, "there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account." No sin will ever remain undetected from His all-seeing eye.

If you have sinned, you will be found guilty. There will be no legal technicality to get you off the hook. There will be no mistakes in your prosecution. Numbers 14:18 says of God, "He will by no means clear the guilty."

Furthermore, if you are found guilty of sinning against a holy God, you must receive the just punishment of God. Moses said in Num. 32:23, "be sure your sin will find you out." Paul said in Gal. 6:7-8, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption..." You can't run from God or escape God's judgment. As David said in Psalm 139, there is no place where you can flee from His presence.

So do you still think you can defend yourself at the judgment of God? Well notice with me last of all:

IV. THE PROSECUTOR'S CONCLUSION

Paul says in v.1, "Therefore you are inexcusable, O man..." Or this word (*anapologetos*) can be translated "without defense." I wonder what it will be like on Judgment Day. Will God allow people to try to offer excuses? Will He allow people to make an attempt to defend themselves? Perhaps, some will say, "Lord, I lived better than most people I know. Why, I even lived better than most church people I know." Yet as we have seen, God does not judge us by the standard of conduct of other sinners. The issue is this: Have we violated *any* of His righteous commandments? The fact is there will be no excuses that will be acceptable with God. No defense that we offer will be acceptable with God.

In fact, notice in v.1 Paul says, "you condemn yourself." We must see a connection between this verse and 1:32. The Jews would also affirm that they who do these things are worthy of death. By the very fact that we all at times judge others of wrongdoing proves that we all recognize that there is a difference between right and wrong. We all recognize that there are sins that deserve punishment. And then Paul drives the nail in the coffin when he points out that fact that we have done many of the same sins that we condemn in others. At the very least we have committed many of the same sins in our heart. The same conscience that allows one to recognize wrong in others brings condemnation upon the moralist. Thus, the Jewish or Christian moralist should be able to see that they condemn themselves!

As we have seen, there is no escape. You cannot escape the judgment of God. What we see here a picture of a man condemned to death, and without excuse or defense. And once the verdict of "Guilty" is declared, there will be no escape from the eternal death that awaits you.

But wait! There is a way of having your case settled out of court. You must move fast. You must come to Christ now! He has already suffered the judgment of God in your place on the

cross. John 3:17-18 says, “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” Don’t wait until Judgment Day comes. It will be too late then. Come to Christ *now*. Heb. 2:3 says, “how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?”

Conclusion: Years ago in a frontier town, a horse bolted and ran away with a wagon that had a little child in it. Seeing that the child was in danger, a young man risked his life to catch the horse and stop it. The child who was saved grew up to become a lawless man, and one day he stood before a judge to be sentenced for a serious crime. The prisoner recognized the judge as the man who, years before, had saved his life; so he pled for mercy on the basis of that experience. But the words from the bench silenced all of his pleas: “Young man, then I was your savior; today I am your judge, and I must sentence you to be hanged.”

One day Jesus Christ will say to rebellious sinners, “During that long day of grace, I was the Savior, and I would have forgiven you. But today I am your judge. Depart from Me, I never knew you!”³

I believe we have seen clear evidence of the fact that we all are sinners in need of a Savior. I hope that everyone who hears this message will agree with the hymn writer, “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood & righteousness.” Perhaps today you will let go of any claim to self-righteousness, and plead nothing but the blood of Jesus!

Sources: Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952); Bruce Corley & Curtis Vaughan, *Romans: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976); Hershel Hobbs, *Romans: A Verse by Verse Study* (Waco: Word Books, 1977); John MacArthur, Jr., *Without Excuse: Principles of God’s Judgment: Study Notes on Romans 2:1-16* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1990); Leon McBeth, *Exegetical & Practical Commentary on Romans* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1937); John Murray, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible [CD-ROM]* (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Right: Romans* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1977). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

³ Told by Warren Wiersbe in *Meet Yourself in the Psalms* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books/SP Publications, Inc., 1983), 108-109, from a sermon by an unnamed evangelist [Illus.#C-1088].