

Guilty Judges

Romans 2:1-16

Do you remember any teachers or professors who graded on a curve? That is, the standard for grading tests was the highest score achieved by someone in the class. Everyone else's grades were based upon that high score. The teacher would take all the scores and lists them from highest to lowest. Then he would plot a "curve" that identifies which students get an "A," "B," "C" and so on.

Many students liked that system, because they weren't held to a standard of perfection, just a standard of comparison. And as long as the top student didn't score too high, everyone else was fine. The danger, however, as an illustration of God, is that sometimes we are tempted to think that God grades on a curve. We act like God grades on a curve. We might not compare ourselves to the top achiever, but we do compare ourselves to the lower end. And we say, "I'm not as bad as that." It's really not hard to find someone you can compare yourself to, with the conclusion, "I'm not that bad!"

So people say things like, "I'm not a horrible person." "I've tried to live a good life." Or even, "I'm really a pretty good person." Therefore you read a list of sins like we studied two weeks ago in Romans 1, and think, "I'm not guilty of those things." "I've done my best."

The problem is, God doesn't grade on a curve. God doesn't identify the person with the highest score of obedience to his law, and use that level as the standard for judgment. God's standard is far higher. It's perfection. And as we studied last time, the performance of all men is pretty poor. That's a nice way of saying it. What Paul actually said was this,

v.28-31

The Jews whom Paul is addressing in our text this morning must have thought that God graded on a curve. The Gentiles were at the bottom of the curve, and the Jews, of course were at the top. Therefore, a Jew would hear that list of sins in Romans 1 which characterized the Gentiles, and would think, "I'm morally superior to them."

In fact, they would judge those Gentiles for their sins, condemning them to separation from God. But their judgment was hypocritical, for in passing judgment upon others, they ignored their own sin. Paul's message here is very clear. First of all,

I. GOD CONDEMNS OUR HYPOCRITICAL JUDGMENT.

Paul condemns those guilty judges among the Jews. That whom he addresses in,

v.1

Hypocritical judgment is judging someone else for doing the same thing that you are doing! Paul appeals to the Jews' own sense of reason and understanding.

v.2

He's speaking of the Gentiles, that list we read from Romans 1. He starts out by saying exactly what the Jewish leaders wanted to hear.

A. God judges evil doers truthfully.

The words "according to truth" mean that God judges according to the facts of the case. He doesn't consider the status of the people involved, just the facts of the case. That is something American courts and American judges seem

increasingly unable to do, as even our criminal trials these days are based on preconceived opinions and judgments, not on the actual facts and circumstances. Not so with God.

v.11

There is no respect of persons with God. There are no special privileges for some, no judgments governed by outward appearance or position. The only thing that mattered with God's judgment upon evil-doers was the truth. What actually happened. And that accountability before God is a universal truth.

2Cor.5:10 "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."

That is universally true! And Paul was sure to have the full approval of all the Jews at this point. He is sure to have our full approval also, so that we, like the Jews, might be able to fully grasp the significance of his rebuke. It is a rebuke upon hypocrisy. The rebuke is this:

B. Hypocrites who judge other evil doers condemn themselves.

"HYPOCRITES who judge..."

And what's a hypocrite? The man who himself does the very thing he condemns in others. Paul's point is very wisely made. Such men condemn themselves.

v.1 "You condemn yourself."

You are invoking God's judgment upon yourself!

v.3

The obvious answer to the rhetorical question of verse 3 is, "no, of course not." You won't escape God's judgment. After all,

as Paul has already said with obvious approval, "God's judgment is based on truth."

The problem with those guilty judges among the Jews is that they didn't apply that truth to themselves. They just applied it to others. That rebuke upon hypocrisy is exactly the same as we hear from Jesus,

Matt. 7:1 "Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 "For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. 3 "And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? 4 "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? 5 "Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

This rebuke is not upon those who see clearly to identify sin in other people, it is not a rebuke against forming a judgment based upon truth, a judgment that a person has, in fact, sinned. It is not a rebuke upon passing judgment upon others. It is not a rebuke upon identifying sin in other people.

But the rebuke is upon the blindness of those who do the very things they condemn in others. The principle, as Jesus so clearly explains it is that you will be judged by the same measure you use to judge others.

Therefore, we must judge ourselves before we begin to judge others. And we must be careful to stricter and harsher with ourselves than we ever attempt to be with others. Again, Jesus' words, "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? 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? You hypocrite.”

But with that self-judgment, Jesus does tell us to confront and restores others who are caught in sin. He says, “First take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”

We should be helping others to remove the speck from their eyes.

Gal. 6:1 “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.”

But first, first, first, judge yourself. God condemns hypocritical judgment, those who see all the faults in others but none of them in themselves. That practice is rampant today.

Paul gets much more specific in his criticism of those Jews in, v.5

Now,

II. GOD DESCRIBES HIS OWN TRUE JUDGMENT.

God’s judgment will be day of wrath, a day of revelation of righteous judgment. That day of judgment is an essential part of the gospel which Paul proclaims, v.16

And on that day,

A. God will judge all men according to their own works.
v.6

That’s an OT quotation,

Ps. 62:12 “Also to You, O Lord, belongs mercy; For You

render to each one according to his work.”

Prov. 24:12 If you say, “Surely we did not know this,” Does not He who weighs the hearts consider it? He who keeps your soul, does He not know it? And will He not render to each man according to his deeds?”

Jesus himself claimed to fulfill that promise of judgment.

Mat.16:27 “For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.”

God will judge all men according to their own works. Or, as I read a few moments ago,

2Cor.5: 10 “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

Romans 2:5-10 are a commentary on that verse.
v.5-10

Now, let me ask a question that I hope has already occurred to you. The question is this, “If you are saved by grace through faith, then how can these verses be true?” Do you see the dilemma? These verses seem to say that salvation and judgment are based upon works. I’ll read them again,
v.5-10

But we read in chapter 1,

Rom. 1:16 “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.”

Does Paul contradict himself? Well, “NO!” So what does he mean here?

Well, to begin with the obvious--judgment at the last day will be judgment of works.

v.6

So, for those who will receive the favorable judgment of life, eternal life, for them there will be good works. There will be good fruit in their lives. And God rewards those whose lives have shown forth good fruit, the fruit of doing good, by seeking glory, honor and immortality.

v.7

Their resulting reward is so specifically described,
v.10

Those who, during their lives, seek glory, God’s glory, shall receive eternal glory. Those who seek peace shall obtain eternal peace. Those who seek immortality shall, indeed, find eternal peace. And who are those who, during their lives, seek glory, honor and immortality? They are the ones whom God has saved by grace through faith.

It is not that their good works have earned for them their salvation. Rather, it is their good works that demonstrate the reality of their salvation that was received entirely by grace through faith.

Let me put it more simply. A person who is saved by grace through faith will demonstrate the reality of that salvation by doing good works. Never is that connection made clearer than in,

Eph.2:8 “For by grace you have been saved through faith,

and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

We are saved by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone! If no good works result from that faith, then that faith is no faith at all. In the bold words of James,

James 2:14 “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? 17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”

He continues,

James 2:18 But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. 19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe--and tremble! 20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? 22 Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? 23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” And he was called the friend of God. 24 You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.”

James 2:25 “Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? 26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

Faith that does not result in good works is dead faith, it is no faith at all. So how can you tell whether or not faith is real? By the evidence. The same evidence which God considers at the final judgment.

v.6-7

v.10

The same is true of unbelievers.

v.8-9

Note well the description of those without Christ, those without faith, those who will be condemned. First and foremost, they are self-seeking. The word means selfish ambition, it describes those living for themselves and for their own glory.

They reject the truth, the truth about God. They do not obey it. They follow evil. For them, there will be indignation and wraths. Trouble and distress. They will deserve the condemnation they received.

v.6

Please understand this. Salvation is by faith, entirely by faith. You are justified, that is, declared innocent and made righteous, by faith, by what you believe! Not by what you do. You are not under the curse of the law to perform up to a certain standard to achieve God's favor. You cannot atone for your sins by doing something yourself.

BUT, you cannot claim to have faith, true saving faith, if there is no evidence in your life of the good works which God prepared in advance for you to do. Paul is warning these guilty, hypocritical judges among the Jews that they will face God's eternal judgment if they fail to bear the fruit of doing good! That is a warning our society desperately needs to hear.

That judgment of God will be based on truth, for God does not show favoritism. The Jews will not escape the judgment because of their ethnic identity. For God's judgment, just like the proclamation of the gospel itself, will be first for the Jew and then the Gentile.

v.9-10

But what about those who aren't Jews? What about those who don't have the law? What does Paul tell the Jews about the judgment to come upon the Gentiles? How will that judgment be based upon the truth, when those people have not received the truth?

Paul answers those questions. The answer is pretty simple and easy to understand.

B. God will judge all men according to their own knowledge of his law.

v.12

The phrase "without the law" refers to Gentiles, those who had not received God's law in its written form. There is a similar phrase in,

1Cor. 9:20 "...and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; 21 to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law."

Clearly, those "without the law" are Gentiles, non-Jews. So it is here. And those Gentiles have sinned, but they have sinned without God's written revelation of his law.

So what is the basis of their judgment? The law which God has written in their hearts.

v.14-15

This is a very important doctrine. And it applies to our day just as surely as it applied in that day. It's crucial to our understanding of unbelievers today, and it relates to what I said last sermon as well. Speaking of unbelievers, Paul said they are those,

Rom.1:32 "...who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them."

Unbelievers know God's righteous decrees. By nature, as Paul says, by natural instinct as creatures created in the image of God, all men have a sense of morality. The requirements of the law are written on their hearts, and so they become their own law.

And every single person knows that he has violated the law. Deep down, if the truth were not suppressed in wickedness, every person knows that he is guilty. Even those who have never heard about Jesus Christ and who have never read the Bible feel their own guilt. Human beings, created in God's image, have a system of morality written in their hearts, and every unbeliever will be judged according to that own system within them.

And condemned.

v.14-15

Those who don't have the written revelation of that law still have some of the law in their own hearts, and will be condemned for their sin.

Others have the full written revelation of God's law, and thus will be judged according to that. The phrase "in the law" refers to

the Jews, those who had received God's law in its written form. Those who sin, having that law, will be judged by that same law. That's the condemnation announced upon the Jews. It is specifically a condemnation upon those who hear the law, but fail to obey it. And that is, of course, the main point of this whole chapter in this book.

v.12b-13

Again, Paul is not contradicting the doctrine of justification by faith alone. But he is condemning those who presume upon God to think that they are saved simply by hearing the word and not obeying it!

Yet to this point I've skipped over one verse, verse 4. In this description of God's judgment upon hypocrites, I've skipped over the one verse that reveals the only means of escaping this judgment.

Repentance.

v.4

III. REPENTANCE IS THE ONLY PATH TO ESCAPE GOD'S JUDGMENT.

Don't miss the fact that this chapter is also an invitation of the gospel! It is a warning of judgment, to be sure, but that warning comes in the context of the gospel.

Paul preaches the gospel to these guilty judges by rebuking them for their hypocrisy. They are, in fact, guilty of presuming upon God's grace and favor. They are, in fact, showing contempt for the riches of God's kindness, tolerance and patience.

God had demonstrated incredible patience with the Jews, his OT people. Time after time, he demonstrated his faithfulness

despite their unfaithfulness. Time after time he blessed them because of a covenant promise he had made, despite their failure to keep their covenant responsibilities.

God had been good, that is, he had given them many favors. God had been forbearing, that is, restraining his wrath. And God had been patient, that is, longsuffering. Literally the word means a long temper, as opposed, obviously, to a short temper. God had put up with a lot.

And those hypocritical Jews were treating all of that with contempt, despising God's grace by rejecting it. They thought themselves above God's judgment, thus they showed contempt for his mercy.

Likewise, people today who think of themselves as good in God's sight, those who think themselves above God's judgment because of their outward position or external appearance, they show contempt for the riches of God's kindness, tolerance, and patience. There are many such self-righteous people today, self-satisfied in their comfortable identity as members of a church, but whose lives are wicked in their hypocrisy.

Paul is saying to those Jews, "You have missed the great lesson and purpose of the goodness of God as it bears upon your responsibility." You have failed to recognize the significance of God's forbearance. You have thought that you were actually righteous since you had received God's blessings as a nation, when, in fact, God's blessings were the demonstration of his forbearance!

They were spiritually self-satisfied, thinking that their relationship with God was fine and secure. But God was simply restraining his wrath. And the warning of this passage is that

such,

A. Self-satisfied hypocrisy leads you away from repentance.

v.4

They did show contempt. They didn't realize that God was calling them to repentance. And they were led away from repentance.

v.5

That's an extremely harsh warning given to Jewish leaders!

By application, that warning could be given to many self-satisfied professed Christians today.

v.8

v.5

The hardest thing about this message is that the very people who need to hear it the most are the very ones most resistant to it. The very ones who most need to hear this warning are the ones most confidently believing that these words apply to someone else.

Jesus told a story about such a dilemma.

Luke 18:10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men--extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. 12 'I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' 13 "And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' 14 "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts

himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

And aren’t we tempted to say, “God I thank you that I am not like that Pharisee.”

But sometimes, we are!

The condemnation upon the Jew here in Romans 2 is that he failed to understand the most basic point of the gospel invitation.

B. God’s kindness leads you toward repentance.

God’s forbearance, his putting up with your sin, restraining his wrath and withholding his judgment--all of that is designed to humble a man, to bring him to his knees, to bring him to tears with the grief of repentance.

The gospel of salvation by grace doesn’t give anyone a license to go on in their sin. Instead, realizing the kindness of God, we are drawn to repentance.

It is my responsibility as a preacher to proclaim to you the true nature of God’s judgment, and to warn you. So if you think that you are righteous in yourself, therefore not in need God’s mercy, then,

Rom. 2:5 “... in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.”

It is also my responsibility, my privilege, to proclaim to you that,

Ps. 103:8 “The LORD is merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. 9 He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever. 10 He has not dealt with us

according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities. 11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; 12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.”

So if you truly understand God’s goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, it will certainly lead you to repentance, the only path by which you will escape God’s judgment.

Dear people of God, put away any remnants of effects of self-satisfied hypocrisy. Stop judging others for the speck in their eyes when there is a plank in your own. Don’t be like these guilty judges among the Jews. Rather, let your understanding of the riches of the goodness of God crush the pride of your heart, and with genuine repentance, “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.”

May the goodness of God leads you to repentance.