

Calling out the Self-Righteous: Part 1

Romans 2:1-11

“God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.” (Luke 18:11)

Introduction: There are two jobs that every young person should work at some point, especially those who are planning on going into any kind of vocational ministry, or serve in any way. The first is to **work maintenance at a church**, where you will learn how to serve people, do the mundane, observe the downside of how people treat things (and don’t clean up after themselves), and be able to do it all with a joyful attitude. In order to lead you must be willing to serve, and be willing to do the things that no one else wants to do. You also learn how to look busy when you really are not, but that’s a different lesson for a different time.

The second job is being a referee, especially in a high pace, close proximity sport like basketball. Most competitive people who have played organized sports have had run-ins with referee’s, since we believe we saw a call the right way but it was called the opposite. In fact, most spectators see things 100% accurately and have never made a mistake on a call, as long as they go the way they want. I remember watching high school basketball games when I was in elementary school in the bleachers and listened to “**Mr. B**” (I won’t say his name in case people at home listen to the podcast) yell, scream, and question every call the ref would make. It was amazing because he only pointed out when they were wrong (often) and never pointed out when they were right! This was a normal phenomenon until my dad, a mild mannered, avoiding conflict man, yelled back what everyone was thinking, “*Mr. B, if you know so much about refereeing, why don’t you go and ref the games!*” Obviously this was calling Mr. B’s bluff, and it quieted him down for a while, since he was exposed as a know-it-all who really knew nothing at all.

It’s easy for all of us to play the **comparison** game with each other or the world around, and either we compare *up* when we look with envy the things other people have: ‘*I wish I had their house, marriage, vacation, job, kids, etc*’, which shows a lack of contentment and thankfulness, or we *compare down*, feeling better about ourselves that we are not like **them** (whoever *they* are). This is the core of a *judgmental* heart, drawing conclusions and becoming the standard of righteousness. Comparison often leaves us with a misshaped view of ourselves, especially when compared to God and His standard.

This is the crux of what we’ll look at this morning: *seeing ourselves properly before the righteous truth of God rather than comparing ourselves to others. When we see clearly, we know exactly who we are and what needs to be done.*

Caution #1: Beware of the judgmental boomerang (2:1-3)

*Therefore, you have no excuse, O man, every one of you **who judges**. For in **passing judgment on another you condemn yourself**, because you, the judge, **practice the very same things**. 2 We know that the judgment of God **rightly falls** on those who practice such things. 3 Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and **yet do them yourself**—that you will escape the **judgment of God**?*

We took a look at the first argument Paul made concerning God’s wrath and judgment over sin, and what he laid out *seemed* to include everyone and was pervasive. The gospel displays the righteousness of God through the power of God in Jesus Christ to save anyone from their sin through faith, since only

Christ can uphold the righteousness of God. But in order to understand the gospel, each person must come to grips with the fact that they **need saving**, that they have violated God's perfect standard, and are under judgement. In Romans 1:18-32 Paul laid out a **present** judgment that is levied against humanity. When we **exchange the truth of God for a lie or worship the creation rather than the Creator**, His wrath is seen by *giving us over to our sin, in both desire and action*. We looked at how **idolatry** left unrepentant will breed unnatural **immorality**, and left unrepentant will breed **insanity**, a depraved mind that not only commits sin, invents sin, but **approves of others sin**, even though we KNOW there is a God and death comes as a result of our sin. This process not only explains our world around us today, our own plight, and was a bit exhausting. But, *Paul was not done...*

In order to understand chapter 2 and much of the rest of Romans, we must understand Paul's rhetorical style. He was trained as a Pharisee, a lawyer and expert in the Law. In modern times, a Jewish *yeshiva* will train in debate, helping students make an argument about the Law from the Law. A friend named Doug Bookman said he was invited in to watch a debate between two students who would face each other and were given a topic: *if a person stole bread, ate a piece, but was convicted and spit the piece out of his mouth and returned the loaf, did he violate the law?* The two students would argue a side, then the rabbi would come by and have them switch sides and argue the opposing side. This was the kind of debate and logic that Paul understood, and when he wrote Romans 1-3, it was like he was taking the **whole world to court, building a case that EVERYONE was guilty**. To do this he used what is called a **diatribe**, *instituting rhetorical questions in a dialogue with an imaginary opponent to drive the reader to a desired conclusion*. In this case, he most likely is using the phrase, '**O man**' as a placeholder for a Jewish opponent, although generally it was someone who was a moralist.

One of the ways Paul used this stylistic tactic was to **anticipate questions** that his reader would have asked or objected to in his explanation. So we need to understand that he is not necessarily calling out someone in particular in the church at Rome, but instead building a case against ALL of humanity, so that no one could say they skated around God's judgement. The question he was answering rhetorically in chapter 2 is the person who basically said, "Ok, I'm not an idolater nor am I sexually immoral, but totally agree with you (Paul) that those who do these things should be judged by God's wrath! So bravo! It's about time God dealt with those pagans!" So Paul is addressing the **self-righteous person in general and a Jewish reader who would have thought that because they had the Law and God's blessing, they somehow were special, missing God's judgment**.

The **judgement boomerang**, then, is cast against the one who NOT only judge's others, but hypocritically does the same thing for which they are judging others. *But what does that mean? What sins are they committing that they are unaware of?* The answer is seen in the "therefore", which connects verses 28-31 with 2:1. Notice that this list included *external sins* like murder, gossip, slander, and disobedience to parents, but also **pride driven, internal, and heart level sin** like envy, boasting, hating God, foolish, faithless, and heartless. It is far easier to **point out the sin of another than to recognize your own**. This was the plight of some Jewish people, but absolutely still plagues us today. A few considerations of judgment:

- 1) **The right and wrong place of judgement on others** – 1 Corinthians 5 relates a situation in the church at Corinth where a man was sleeping with his father's wife, and the church had not dealt with it. Paul encouraged the congregation to confront the habitually immoral people since a 'little leaven leavens the whole loaf', to put them out of the church and not even eat with them to drive them to repentance. If that whole process seemed overly harsh, Paul said:

1 Corinthians 5:11-13 *"11 But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler — not even to eat with such a one. 12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom **you are to judge**? 13 **God judges those outside.** "Purge the evil person from among you."*

When an UNBELIEVER acts sinfully, it means they are living according to the light and truth they know. When a BELIEVER who is part of God's church acts sinfully, they must be called out of their sin and to repentance. We have a right and responsibility with those IN the church, rather than judging those OUTSIDE.

- 2) **The right and wrong measure of judgement** – We have a standard of judgement in God's Word, and a believer has placed themselves under the whole counsel. But we can only judge what is seen and not go beyond what is written (1 Cor. 4:6). Why? Because only God can judge the motives and intentions of our hearts:

1 Corinthians 4:5 *"Therefore do not **pronounce judgment** before the time, before the Lord comes, who will **bring to light the things now hidden in darkness** and will **disclose the purposes of the heart**. Then each one will receive his commendation from God."*

Two huge cautionary principles. First, we are not able to judge the things we cannot see in people's heart. Second, God absolutely will. In other words, He will hold everyone accountable for not only what they have DONE, but what they have thought, or what is hidden in their motives, or the purposes or intentions of the heart. This should be a concerning caution, since we can always get away with something from people, but we get away with **nothing** from the Lord.

- 3) **The right and wrong reaction to the reality of sin** – We heard the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector preached this summer (Luke 18:9-14) by Bill Windham, where Jesus addressed the hypocrisy of the religious moralist. The Pharisee looked at the Tax Collector, a known and egregious sinner, with contempt and pride. "God, thank you that I am not like THAT guy...he's the worst! But thank you that I am awesome, since I give my money and even fast twice a week!" Jesus made the same argument that Paul is making here, where self-righteous judgment sees the sin of others, and totally misses their own. The Tax Collector **knew he was sinful, which humbled him and caused him to look down and simply cry out for mercy from the Lord. Only the tax collector was accepted and approved by God.**

Notice that verse 2 gives the basis of judgement being God's truthful and right judgment. There is only one Person in the universe who has the right to judge not only actions, but thoughts and intentions. God in His nature is righteous, and out of that He created the universe and set the boundaries and rules. Because He never compromised, He possesses the only credible grounds to judge, which He will bring about at the end of time and perfectly judge all that a person has done. The point Paul is making is that God will always get it right, there are no loopholes, and absolutely nothing will remain hidden. A religious or moral person should have known this.

Paul's second address to "**O man**" asked the question we should ask ourselves today. Knowing the basis of judgement and the One who judges, we all must understand that we HAVE practiced the things we detest and stand under God's rightful, wrathful judgement.

Let's consider a couple of things together. In a polarized culture, it is easy to see where Romans 1:18-32 plays out. There is rank sin going on all around us, and we have even stooped so low as a culture that we call gross, sinful acts **love, or compassion, or healthy**. Now, we rightly see those things as sinful and against God's design. But Paul's point would be this for us: *we can diagnose the sin OUT there, but are we adept at diagnosing the sin IN here!?!?* Do we see our pride, or arrogance, or selfishness, or boasting, or gossiping, or foolishness as equally condemning?

Caution #2: Beware of Presuming on God (2:4-5)

*Or do you **presume** on the riches of his **kindness** and **forbearance** and **patience**, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to **lead you to repentance**? 5 But because of your **hard** and **impenitent heart** you are **storing up wrath for yourself** on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.*

There is a phrase that says "The same sun that melts the wax hardens the clay". This is the point of Paul's rhetorical question posed. The argument he makes is like a spoiled child who gets chance after chance after chance to obey, only growing up to expect that mommy and daddy will bail them out of everything. Each time the child became emboldened to continue the same path rather than turning and becoming obedient. Here, the idea that God is **gracious and kind** to postpone judgement does not mean He has forgotten about sin. His wrath is **restrained, not nullified**. In other words, each time we sin in this world, God's grace is seen and experienced that He doesn't just squash us and end us, rightfully, right then. Instead, *"The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."* (2 Peter 3:9) Man's presumption, or despising or showing contempt, is to continue to sin, presuming that since nothing has happened yet, then most likely nothing ever will happen.

In Israel's history, we saw this play out vividly in **Ezekiel 16**, an R-rated exposure of Israel's rank idolatry and presumption against the LORD. He recounts their origin story, how they were nothing, like a baby cast out and unwanted into a field (16:5). But God picked her up, washed her, adorned her, and made her beautiful (16:9-14). But instead of returning to Him with worship, praise, and thankfulness, Israel instead did the unthinkable:

Ezekiel 16:15 *"But you trusted in your beauty and played the whore because of your renown and lavished your whorings on any passerby; your beauty became his."*

This was the tame part of the explanation. Israel presumed on her beauty and privilege of being God's chosen people, and continued down a path of unspeakable sin, which brought shame, lewdness, and abominations. If not for God's remembering of His covenant and making atonement for her (16:59-63), Israel would have been done.

Again, the point Paul is making in Romans should not be lost. The fact that He is kind and patient should signal our need for **repentance**. Now, we throw around this word, but it is good to give it a bit of definition. The word is *metanoia* and means a *change of mind, a comprehensive change of attitude, desire, and direction*. Repentance is a gift of grace, and is an aspect of faith. If sin is sourced in an exchange of the truth of God for a lie, then **repentance is a reversal of that exchange**. Repentance is turning FROM idols TO the living and true God (1 Thess. 1:9). It means that faith is not merely believing in our mind, but actually having our mind transformed. The gospel makes us new creations, replacing old desires with new, sinful habits with pure ones, selfish directions with selfless ones. It is what Jesus proclaimed after His resurrection:

Luke 24:46-47 *“Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, 47 and that **repentance** (metanoia) **for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem**”*

What happens when such a call breeds indifference rather than repentance? Our heart gets hardened, like dirt left out in the Simi Valley winds in October, and instead of repenting we become *impenitent*, stubbornly holding on to the illusion and deception that somehow **we are not sinful**. This means that sins get stored up, like savings in a bank, ready to be dealt with and paid for in the final judgement. This means that NO ONE at the judgement can cry foul that they did not have enough time, since ample time was given to repent. But the time to do so will not be forever.

It's good to stop here and consider one more time. This is not to pound the pulpit or throw out some fire and brimstone, frothy mouthed appeal. This is simply a time to evaluate our hearts and lives, the places where no one else knows can see. It did not matter whether you grew up in a church or know more Bible verses than you can count. The issue in salvation is always that WE CANNOT earn salvation on our own, by our works, or especially by comparison. We come to true saving faith when we realize WE OURSELVES are abject sinners. The problem I have observed in my own heart and in pastoring for these years is that most people will admit they are wrong and sinful, but NOT THAT sinful. They are not the kind who deserve judgment, since they have overall done right, especially compared to others. But this false bravado is exactly Paul's argument here.

How do I know if I've repented and believe? One answer is that you continue to repent and believe. Salvation that comes by repentance for the forgiveness of sin means a life where we continue to repent, turning from sin as it is revealed, as a lifestyle of walking with Christ. Joy comes when we realize that sin keeps us away from fellowship and pleasing God, and there is no condemnation for our sin, so we can freely confess it, turn from it, and move toward Christ. It is exactly the opposite of what Adam and Eve did in the Garden. Instead of running from God in fear we run to him without fear (1 John 4:18 – *“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love”*)

This life will keep us away from becoming *judgmental toward others, and replace it with compassion*. It will keep us away from **hypocrisy** by reminding ourselves of our own sin and need for repentance. This does not mean that obedience is not important, as the next section points out (which we'll cover next week), but that none of us here should ever claim or get close to thinking that we are somehow without sin while pointing out others.

So today, where do you find yourself? Are you someone who understands your sin and need to repent, or are you waiting because things in your life are going ok? The Lord is patient, but with limits. Today is a day of salvation to all who believe! Today is a day of salvation, forgiveness, and repentance, knowing the power of God through the work of Christ for all who believe.

Caution #3: God's judgment will be just and impartial (6-11)

He will render to each one according to his works:** 7 to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; 8 but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. 9 There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the **Jew first and also the Greek**, 10 but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, **the Jew first and also the Greek**. 11 **For God shows no partiality