

Coming Judgment

Romans 2:1-13

FIRST THOUGHTS

Standing before a judge can be a sobering experience, even if it's only for the speeding ticket in your hand. When a police officer pulls you over and gives you a ticket, you set it aside and get back on the road. However, from that moment on, you know that one day you will be accountable to a judge. On that day, the ticket serves as undeniable proof of your accountability.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

In Romans 1:18-25, Paul described the guilt of the Gentiles. Though they had seen evidence of God in creation, they had suppressed the truth and stood without excuse before Him. The refusal of the Gentiles to recognize and honor God as Creator led them to make their own rules for creation (Rom. 1:26-32).

Jewish readers may have applauded at these words. However, in Romans 2, Paul reminded the Jews that they were no different from the Gentiles when it came to facing God's judgment. They had rejected the truth of the Messiah, and their sin was just as depraved as the Gentiles. They didn't have room for an excuse either! Paul wanted the Romans—Jews and Gentiles alike— to recognize their sin, enter a genuine relationship with Christ, and produce good works as a result.

KEY DOCTRINE

Man

In the beginning man was innocent of sin and was endowed by his Creator with freedom of choice. By his free choice man sinned against God and brought sin into the human race. (See Genesis 3; Psalm 51:5.)

NO EXCUSES (ROMANS 2:1-5)

Paul's use of *therefore* connected his current words to his previous words. In Romans 1, he had detailed the downward spiral of Gentiles who had rejected God's revelation, but in Romans 2, he reminded the Jewish people that they too were *without excuse*. In other

words, all of humanity stood guilty before the Lord because sin had infected every person since Eden, except Jesus. For that reason, no one had a just basis to *judge another* person. People can be lost in unrighteousness, but they also can be lost in self-righteousness. This is not a simple evaluation of someone's actions or holding them accountable. Rather, it involves hypocrisy, where the one doing the judging is doing *the same things*. The verb's present tense indicates that a "judge" is also a habitual sinner.

Unlike self-righteous human judgment, God's judgment is grounded in *truth*. This is not surprising because God is *truth* (John 14:6; 16:13; 17:17). Therefore, His judgments are always just, whereas humans tend toward a prejudice fueled by self-righteousness. Because God's judgment is based on His true and just character, it is impartial, not hypocritical.

Paul knew that the Jews judged the Gentiles' sexual sin and idolatry (Rom. 1:24-27), but they were unwilling to deal with their own wickedness (1:29-31). They believed they would *escape* judgment by comparing their sin to the sins of others. Paul asked the Romans a question. Did they think they could judge others and yet *do the same* as the Gentiles they condemned? The truth is that God judges all sin, not merely certain sins. Gentiles had no excuse, but neither did the Jews. All will stand before the truth-based judgment of God, guilty and in need of a Savior.

While Paul did not excuse sin, neither did he leave his readers without hope. He reminded them that by judging others they *despise the riches* of God's *kindness, restraint, and patience*. The Lord demonstrates self-restraint in not immediately destroying sinners (2 Pet. 3:15). Some assume this *kindness* means that He never judges sinners, while others believe it only applies to themselves. In Romans, the apostle established the universality of sin and humanity's universal guilt before God. Paul further explained that God's patience leads people

to **repentance**. Realizing they were sinners and that God is withholding His final judgment should create a yearning in people's hearts to turn from their sin to the Father.

However, rather than experiencing God's kindness through repentance, many display a **hardened and unrepentant heart**. In Greek, the word hardened serves as the root for the hardening of the arteries (arteriosclerosis). Those who know the truth but resist it are **storing up wrath** that God would pour out on them.

PERFECT STANDARD (ROMANS 2:6-11)

Some have incorrectly taught that these verses indicate salvation is achieved by works, but Paul left no doubt. Salvation comes through faith, not works (Eph. 2:8-10). Here, Paul quoted Psalm 62:12 and Proverbs 24:12 to demonstrate this truth. God **will repay** people for their **works**, but this defined the basis of judgment, not the path to salvation.

Paul divided people into two categories. First, some **seek glory, honor, and immortality** in response to what God has done for them. These people find **eternal life** and demonstrate this new life by **doing good**. Again, Paul did not teach that anyone is saved by works. Rather, one's actions attest to a relationship with Christ.

Others **disobey the truth** and pursue **unrighteousness**. While God longs to save people, **self-seeking** lifestyles lead to His **wrath and anger**. *Wrath* describes a slow-burning antagonism, while *anger* is a sudden burst. While we are not saved by our works, we will be judged for evil works and rewarded for good works. Paul noted that judgment would come **first to the Jew**, followed closely by **the Greek**. But none are exempt.

In contrast, those who do **what is good** will receive **glory, honor, and peace**. Those who are reconciled to God seek the things of God rather than their own selfish desires. Notice that Paul included the same phrasing as the previous verse—**first to the Jew, and also to the Greek**.

Paul's argument hinged on God's innate fairness. There is **no favoritism with God**, a principle which the Bible consistently teaches. Though Israel may have enjoyed some privileges as God's people (Rom. 9:4-5), ethnic background and racial privilege will not deter Him from either blessing or punishing them based upon their deeds.

ONE WAY (ROMANS 2:12-13)

Paul affirmed that the eternal consequences of sin are universal. Both those who know the law and those who reject the law face judgment as sinners. Hearing the gospel is not sufficient for salvation. Individuals would need to fulfill the requirements of the law perfectly, which is impossible. As a result, salvation comes only through a personal relationship with Christ who justifies us (Rom. 8:4).

One key difference between the Jews and Gentiles in Rome was that the Israelites possessed the law. As a result, they knew the righteous requirements of God. In contrast, the Gentiles broke the law in ignorance. Paul declared that, in the end, everyone would be judged personally for their sin.

Those who **sin without the law** (Gentiles) will **perish** without the law. The Greek word rendered perish also occurs in John 3:16 and 1 Corinthians 1:18. As noted, ignorance of the gospel does not excuse people from God's judgment. Likewise, those who **sin under the law will be judged by the law**. While the Gentiles stood under judgment by natural revelation found in creation, the Jews stood under judgment by the special revelation of the law given by God to Moses. They knew the law and still transgressed it.

Paul was setting the stage for a logical argument supporting justification through faith in Jesus Christ—something he would flesh out as the letter progressed. All are sinners, and all deserve judgment. However, through the substitutionary death of Jesus and by faith, a person can be made right with God.

Next Week – Saving Faith, Romans 3:21-4:5

