

## GOD'S METHOD OF JUDGMENT - I

Romans 2:1-5

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July 30, 2017

A couple weeks ago, I got news that my nephew, a husband and father of two little ones, had been in an accident. The picture of what remains of his car after another driver failed to stop at a red light is not pretty. He is alive and recovering after surgery to mend his broken leg with a plate and screws. As you can imagine, the driver of the other vehicle feels horrible about it.

Then the other day, I almost did the very same thing! I jammed on my brakes at the last minute, which kept me from entering the intersection. You know what my first reaction was? It was, "Phew! That was close!" My second reaction was to look around to see if anybody I knew was watching!

We are so afraid of what people are going to think of us when we blow it. We hate to admit our mistakes. We will do anything to divert people's attention away from our own flaws. When it comes to being exposed for not measuring up, we quickly go on the defense to cover up, or we make excuses for our wrong doing. Sometimes, the more successful we are or the more moral others may think we are, the greater the fear we have of letting people see our real humanness.

The apostle Paul understood this about himself and others. Knowing these things about people, Paul introduces a new subject about judging others, in our first look at **Romans 2**.

For any who may be guests with us this morning, allow me to set the stage for our study of this chapter. We find ourselves in the middle of a major section of the book of **Romans**. This section covers **1:18-3:20**. Here Paul spells out the problem of all humanity. In **Romans 1:18-23**, Paul begins with an indictment against every human being who has ever lived—we are guilty of ignoring or suppressing the truth about God that He has made evident to all people. Through the rest of this major section, like a prosecuting attorney, Paul lays out the case against all human beings for having suppressed the truth about God and for having exchanged the truth about God for a lie. When he is

finished with this section, he will rest his case that indeed, all of us stand guilty before God, condemned to experience His eternal wrath.

Thank goodness, his case against humanity does not end there. Beginning with **3:21**, Paul lays out for all to see God's way of escape through Jesus Christ. We will start looking at that good news in weeks to come.

But for now, we find ourselves in this major section where Paul, the prosecuting attorney, step by step, presents his case against us. In **Romans 1:24-3:20**, Paul addresses four groups of people that pretty much cover all of us. The first is the Hedonist (**1:24-32**). These are individuals who live for their own pleasure, which most often is immoral in nature. As a result of the hedonist's godless approach to life, chaos reigns in society. Next in the section we will be looking at this morning, Paul addresses the Self-righteous moralist (**2:1-11**). This is followed by the Enlightened pagan (**2:12-16**) who may never have heard about God's Laws or Jesus Christ. The fourth class of people is the Religionist (**2:17-3:8**). Paul concludes this section in **3:9-20** with the thought that all people, apart from those who have put their trust in Jesus Christ, stand condemned before God. On our own, no person will be able to stand before God and make a successful argument to be accepted based on his own merit.

Having just read the awful summation of the immoral hedonist in **verses 24-32**, what do you think the natural human defensive response of most moral people would be?

“Oh, Paul, that's not who I am. You must not be talking about me. I'm not like those hedonists. They deserve God's wrath, those sexual perverts, those incorrigible rebels, those depraved nonconformists who can no longer discern right and wrong. Man, I'm with you on this Paul. If we could only get rid of that kind of people, we could get on with living for You, and this world would be a lot safer to live in.”

Understanding that typical response, Paul directs our attention to this second group of defensive people: the Self-righteous moralist in **Romans 2:1-11**. From the very beginning of these verses, Paul warns his readers to “take a close look at yourselves before you judge others and proclaim yourself innocent of deserving God's wrath. Futhermore, I want you to understand

how God will look at you. How God will hold you accountable and judge you.”

In these first eleven verses, Paul is going to reveal several guidelines by which God brings judgment against all people, but specifically against the self-righteous moralist who suppresses the truth about God. Although we won't cover all eleven verses this morning, we will begin to collect guidelines by which God will judge the self-righteous. We will read all the section, but limit our focus this morning to just **verses 1-5**.

Follow along in your Bibles as I read. Paul writes:

**<sup>1</sup>Therefore you have no excuse, every one of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. <sup>2</sup>And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. <sup>3</sup>But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgement on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? <sup>4</sup>Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? <sup>5</sup>But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, <sup>6</sup>who will render to each person according to his deeds: <sup>7</sup>to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory**

and honor and immortality, eternal life, <sup>8</sup>but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. <sup>9</sup>There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, <sup>10</sup>but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. <sup>11</sup>For there is no partiality with God.

In **verse 1**, note the term for “**judge**.” It, or a word of the same origin, is used eight times in the first five verses. It is an important term to understand if we are going to properly get a grip on this passage. Unfortunately, the word for “**judge**” is misunderstood by many. So, let’s take a moment to look at this word.

In the original language of the New Testament, the Greek word used here is the word from which we derive our English words critic, critical, and criticism. The word “**judge**” describes a critical type of evaluation that will lead to an unfavorable outcome. It refers to what a judge in a courtroom does when he pronounces a sentence against someone who has been found guilty. He condemns them to a specific outcome.

What kind of unfavorable outcome does Paul have in mind here? Paul tells us when he uses the word “**condemn**” in the same verse. Interestingly, both the word “**judge**” and the word “**condemn**” come from the same Greek root. Hence, this word for judging points to a condemnation of sorts. Because the context of **verses 1-11** concerns eternal destiny, the type of condemnation spoken of here is that of eternal damnation.

Hence, the prohibition in these verses against judging someone points to one human being sitting in judgment over another as to their eternal destiny. As our passage in **Romans 2** will clarify, that job of judgment only belongs to

our perfect and holy God. This is the only type of judging that the scripture prohibits one person from passing on another.

Allow me to take a brief rabbit trail at this point in an attempt to clarify some confusion that persists in some minds. How would you answer the following question: “Is it always wrong for one to judge another?” How many of you would say yes? How many of you would say no? How many of you would say yes and no? How many of you just don’t know?

You see, there is much confusion in people’s minds concerning this subject of judging others. And the reason for this has to do with our misunderstanding of the Biblical use of the word “**judge**,” as we English speakers may use it differently.

For instance, we use the word in reference to evaluating which is the best pie at a county fair. We use the term to determine the distance on the golf course from where the ball lies somewhere in the fairway to the hole. We use the word to discern whether or not people are saved. We use the word to reveal when another Christian is violating the word of God. We have multiple uses for our English word to judge, whereas the prohibition against judging others in the New Testament has only one specific meaning--that of putting oneself in the seat of pronouncing condemnation or damnation against another.

To further help clear up the confusion as to whether we should judge others or not, let’s take a moment and look at **Matthew 7:1**. Please turn there in your Bibles. I often hear well-meaning Christians and non-Christians say, “My parents taught me not to judge,” as though to do so were criminal. But as you will see, Jesus teaches us that there are times when it is right for us to judge, and we are commanded to do so.

As you are turning to **Matthew 7**, allow me to remind you of the context. This passage is the conclusion of Jesus’ famous Sermon on the Mount. In **verse 1** we read, “**Do not judge so that you will not be judged. <sup>2</sup>For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.**” Jesus uses the same term for “**judge**” that the Apostle Paul uses in **Romans 2:1**.

Jesus' point corroborates Paul's concern about one person condemning or damning another person to hell. That is not our job. Furthermore, Jesus tells us that if we sit in judgment on another, we will be judged by the same standard with which we condemned others; and most likely, God would prove that we are guilty of the same thing for which we condemn another, thus damning ourselves to hell as well. Both Paul's and Jesus' words come with this implied warning: our human judgment is not always fair or accurate.

But later in this passage, Jesus does encourage us, in fact, He commands us in a fashion to be evaluators or discerners of others around us who may be in error. Skip down to **Matthew 7:13** and look at what Jesus goes on to say. He says:

**<sup>13</sup>Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction [literally, leads to “damnation”], and there are many who enter through it. <sup>14</sup>For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to [eternal] life, and there are few who find it.**

Why is Jesus telling the twelve disciples this? Because He wants His disciples to be discerning and evaluating of those who come before them as spiritual leaders. How do I know that? Because of what He says next. Jesus literally commands, <sup>15</sup>**“Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. <sup>16</sup>You will know them by their fruits.”** How can someone fulfill the command to “beware” if one is not discerning or evaluating some form of danger? You can’t. To be on the lookout requires that one be discerning, evaluating, or judging the situation. Here, Jesus is commanding us to look closely and to evaluate someone. In this case, Jesus tells us to be fruit inspectors. What are these “**fruits**” that we are looking for? In a moment, Jesus will explain that these fruits are the actions that characterize people as either saved or as “**lawless**” and unsaved.

Jesus continues:

**<sup>16</sup>Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? <sup>17</sup>So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup>A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. <sup>19</sup>Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup>So then, you will know them [false prophets from genuine prophets, saved from the unsaved] by their fruits. <sup>21</sup>Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.**

Note, those who will enter as citizens of heaven for eternity will prove their citizenship (not earn their salvation but prove that they are saved) by that which characterizes their lives.

Jesus continues.

**<sup>22</sup>Many will say to Me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?” <sup>23</sup>And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.”**

Let me hit the pause button right there for a moment. Keep in mind who it is that is sitting in the front row as Jesus is preaching. It is his twelve disciples. Also, keep in mind that Jesus sends all twelve out to minister in pairs, preaching in Jesus’ name, casting out demons in Jesus’ name and performing

miracles in Jesus' name, just as He lists here **Matthew 7**. Furthermore, even Judas, who later betrayed Jesus, was a part of this group. Judas, according to **John 6:70-71**, was never saved. I believe that later, these words must have hit Matthew, the writer of this Gospel, hard when he remembered them as they applied to his friend and fellow disciple Judas, who by then had betrayed Jesus and committed suicide. The thing that separated Judas from the other saved disciples was that he was somewhat of a moral follower of Jesus, but the fruit of his life proved him to be a greedy thief and a traitor of Jesus, because he practiced "**lawlessness.**"

Jesus is clearly teaching his disciples that they do have to judge in the sense of being discerning and evaluating people and conditions around them, as to whether or not they are living in error. How can you reach out to the lost if you cannot discern whether or not they know Jesus?

So, the correct answer to "is it always wrong for one to judge another?" is "No." We are not to pronounce judgment on another, as in damnation, but we are called to use judgment and discernment concerning people's lifestyles.

But how are we called to evaluate our own and other's lives? And what is the standard by which we are to discern? Paul implies the answer to that when he teaches us about the function of the Bible in our lives. He writes in **2 Timothy 3:16-17**, "**All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;** <sup>17</sup>**so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.**" Those terms, "**teaching, reproof, correction, and training**" all point to actions that we do to someone else. Each requires that we evaluate and discern our own lives and others lives. We are not called to judge in the sense of passing damning judgment on others, but we are to judge that we might protect and help others grow up in Christ and be better equipped to serve Him as His ambassadors in this world.

Hence, each of us is to continually be on the alert to hold each other accountable before God in our spiritual walk. We are to instruct, to correct, to exhort, and if necessary, even bring discipline to those Christians who are wandering away from the Lord.

Obviously, there is more that could be said on this subject than we have time for here as to how one corrects another. But the point is that you are to hold me accountable in the way I live my life. If you love Jesus and if you love me, you will correct, rebuke, and hold me accountable. To not do so is to disobey God's Word and to reject me. A true friend corrects or instructs another when they are out of bounds. A true friend holds one accountable. Proverbs states, **"Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy."** (Proverbs 27:6) A loving parent does the very same thing when a child steps out of bounds. The parent corrects, instructs, and disciplines. Evaluating, discerning, and judging in this way is not a hateful thing to do but is good and loving.

To simplify what we have learned thus far, we can say that to judge as in condemn to hell is wrong; to judge as in to discern or evaluate so as to correct is right.

Having addressed that question of whether or not it is appropriate to judge another, let's return to our passage in which Paul speaks directly to the self-righteous moral person who points at the failures of others, thinking that he is beyond the condemnation of God. In **verses 1-5**, we learn several things about God's manner of judging.

Let's read the first section in **verses 1-5**, that illustrates for us how God judges. We read:

**<sup>1</sup>Therefore you have no excuse, every one of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. <sup>2</sup>And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. <sup>3</sup>But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? <sup>4</sup>Or do you think lightly of the**

**riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? <sup>5</sup>But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.**

As Paul writes these words, he takes for granted that his readers understand that everyone intuitively possesses a moral standard. This moral standard is God given. Some people possess more of a moral standard and the conscience to support it, but all have been given this. We don't like it when people violate what we deem as the moral standard. But Paul correctly states that all of us violate our own moral standard. We can't even live up to our own standard, let alone God's clearly written laws. This hypocrisy of condemning others for not living up to a moral standard that we hold is part of Paul's point here. He says that the **"judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things."**

I'm reminded of the two taxidermists who stopped before a window in which an owl was on display. They immediately began to criticize the way it had been mounted. Its eyes were not natural; its wings were out of proportion with its head; its feathers were not neatly arranged; and its feet could certainly be improved. When the two had finished with their criticism, the old owl turned his head and winked at them!

Our observations of ourselves and others and of what is real and true is not always right. But everything God does is by nature right and according to the truth. As Paul says in **Romans 3:4**, **"Let God be found true, though every man be found a liar."** There is always distortion in human perception, but never any in God's. And that leads us to the first observation about God's judgment. God always judges according to the truth; whereas our judgement does not.

In **verse 3**, Paul continues to explain this first principle by asking a very pertinent question that demands a negative response. He says, **"And do you**

**suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment upon those who practice such things and you do the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?"** In other words, do you think God will judge another but not you when you do the same misdeed as the other person did? Obviously not. God's judgment is always fair, and if we practice the very same sins as someone else, then we shouldn't expect to escape God's judgment.

Paul continues in **verse 4**, **"Or do you think lightly of [or literally, think down on or underestimate or even despise] the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?"** Here, Paul highlights another reason why the self-righteous moralist thinks he or she will escape God's judgment. They go on sinning because they see no immediate judgment or negative consequence in their lives to their actions, and they don't see any apparent consequences to others who do likewise. These people don't realize that God is longsuffering toward their sin, in hopes that one day they will see their moral choices for what they are, immoral, and repent.

Check out these three words: The **"kindness"** of God refers to the general benefits that God gives to all people, whether they know Him or not.

**"Forbearance"** speaks of God's withholding His judgment against sinners. He doesn't go out and immediately execute his vengeance against us for mocking Him or deliberately rebelling against Him or for flat out ignoring Him. He forbears with us.

His **"patience"** addresses the time of duration between his expressing His goodness and the time of His eventually expressing His judgment.

People mistakenly believe that since God has not zapped us immediately for our ignoring Him, that we have escaped His judgment. We are very much like the high school student I heard about a few years ago at GPHS. This student clearly underestimated the role and authority of the librarian.

If you take out a book from the library and fail to return it for any reason, you will be charged either a late fine or a lost book charge. For a while, the student received fine notices in the mail for his failure to return the book. Then, for some unknown reason, the notices ceased showing up in the mail.

When this happened, this student made the errant deduction that the librarian had forgotten about the fine or was simply being a nice person, not wanting to cause a big deal about a book, and was shocked when he got a library bill that said, “Pay up or no diploma!”

But **verse 5** gives us the correct understanding. It says “**<sup>5</sup>But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.**” The term “**stubbornness**” is interesting. It refers to hardness. We get our word for sclerosis or arterial sclerosis from it, which you all know refers to the hardening of the arteries, which can bring on a premature death. Unbelievers, through their stubbornness, become spiritually hardened to the things of God the more they continue to ignore Him. To continue to harden one’s heart against God will bring eternal separation from Him. One’s stubbornness, in turn, leads to the “**storing up wrath.**” In some versions the expression “**storing up**” is translated “**treasuring.**” It is the same term that Jesus used in **Matthew 6:21** when he spoke about laying up “**treasure for yourselves in heaven.**” All of us are laying up certain kinds of treasures in eternity. For the believer, hopefully, it will be eternal rewards. But the person who is separated from God and has not received His gift of righteousness will receive only a treasure of the wrath of God, which God promises that they specifically will collect.

The expression, the “**day of wrath**” is key to the rest of this section ending in **verse 16**, which we won’t get to until next week. It reads, “**On that day when according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.**”

This business of God’s being patient and not allowing his judgment to fall at all is going to be rectified in the final courtroom drama in heaven, when all the secrets of those people’s hearts who have rejected Jesus Christ will be made plain. God will evaluate what really is. This idea brackets Paul’s entire thinking from **verses 1 to 16**. Hence, the final observation we will make this morning about God’s judgment is that God’s judgement is sure to come.

This is why if you or anyone you know has not trusted Jesus Christ, no matter how moral they may be, their morality still falls short of God’s perfect standard. If they have not physically murdered someone but have had hatred

in their heart, Jesus says they are guilty of murder. Hence, I'm guilty of murder whether I actually pulled the trigger and killed someone or not. Hence without the savior, I stand no hope of being forgiven or spending eternity with God. But only because I have trusted in Christ do I stand forgiven and acceptable forever before God. If you have not placed your confidence in Christ as your Savior and sought his forgiveness for your sins, you stand no chance of being forgiven or spending eternity with God. If you want to make sure that you stand forgiven before God and accepted by Him, then please pray.