

Have you ever thought about what it would be like to be a judge? I think it would be a very difficult job; you have to be able to sift through people's stories to get the truth. You would have to be able to be fair to those who simply made a mistake. Compassionate but firm on the rules.

How many of you think we have some pretty silly laws here in America? I can tell you one that I'm sure we all will agree on. You cannot be a judge if you have ever been convicted of a felony. That is good to know, how would you feel if criminals were eligible to become the ones who decided what was wrong and what was right? That would have the ability to become devastating.

How could we allow some who could not follow the rules in their own life be in charge of someone else's? A system such as that would never stand. Not that our system is perfect, have any of you ever had to pull jury duty, I'm sure that was a real treat. You along with 11 others had to decide the fate of fellow human being with only the story that both sides were able to prove or disprove. It normally ends up that you are deciding who has the better lawyer.

Imagine how difficult it would be to make decisions such as these in a worldly court; now how much harder it would be to make decisions on a heavenly level. We can say that would be easier because the bible is clear on its rules. So, either you upheld those laws or you did not. On earth we may be dealing with mortal life or death but the supreme judge deals with eternity in heaven or hell. So just as importantly it is that honest, moral, impartial men stand as our judges here on earth how much more important is it that we have the perfect judge for heaven? If He was our standard for being a judge here on earth none of us would qualify.

This passage focuses on God's judgment. Why is it important to understand God's judgment? Firstly, it lets us know that if we put our hope in ourselves, we have no hope. The only way of salvation is through God's grace. Secondly, it reminds us that what we do is important and God is always watching. Jesus paid the price so that we could be forgiven. And thirdly, it reminds us that when we share the gospel, we need to be clear about God's judgment, and make sure people understand that they won't have an excuse.

Romans 2:1-16

V1 We are hypocrites. Most people, even church people, think they are pretty good. They say things like "I don't murder, I don't commit crimes or hurt others". Tell me though if you used God's standard, do you think most would agree that they violate it. This may lead some to

think that God's standard is too high, unachievable even. In any case, everyone, at one time or another violates even the low standards that we set let alone Gods standards.

How can we uncover a person's values of right and wrong? You can see what a person believes is right by the standards they set for others. The passage calls it passing judgment. While a person may justify their own lying, cheating, bribery, etc., you can see their true values by what they demand of others. If a girl tells her boyfriend, he shouldn't lie to her this is establishing standards and then she cannot lie without violating her own standard. Someone tells their co-worker they should not be late, but they cannot get to work on time; guilty. Someone tells their friend they should not talk bad about others and then does it themselves; guilty. We all violate the standards we set for others about what is right and wrong. We all violate not only God's moral law, but also our own. This means we have no excuse. We are all sinners even if we go by our own definitions.

Although the main point of the passage is teaching us that we are guilty and deserve judgment, we can also get a couple of practical points from it. Firstly, always evaluate our own conduct. Don't be in a hurry to tell others what they should do. Remember to remove the plank in your own eye before worrying about speck of dust in your brother's eye. Pay more attention to your own actions than the actions of others. And be merciful towards the people that mistreat you, cut in line, and are rude to you, because we have probably done the same thing.

When I was younger, I could not stand it when someone did not move over from the right lane to the left lane to let me pull out of a parking lot or a side road. No one was over there; they could have easily moved over so I didn't have to wait for this whole line of traffic behind them. Or when someone drove in the left lane and was barely doing the speed limit. Oh, I would get so mad! But then I caught myself not moving over to let others out, maybe I was talking to Jennifer and not paying attention. I have also felt like I had to drive in the left lane, have any of you ever pulled a trailer down a rough right lane of the interstate? Pulling my camper on the interstate in some of those rutted and bumpy right lanes would turn everything inside of it upside down. So, there I am doing 5 over in the fast lane, knowing if I was following me, that would never be enough. And I finally came to the realization that not everyone is in the same hurry as I am...and the speed limit is actually the fastest we should go, that doesn't mean we have to go that fast. See when we pay attention to the things we are doing wrong it really helps us not to pass judgement on others so quickly. Now, don't get all this twisted I still struggle on the road, but I have graduated from road rage to road upsetness.

We all agree that we are supposed to share the gospel, right? Well as we do that, we must make sure that we also share this point to make sure people understand that they are in fact

sinner and will face judgment. Especially focus on this if they think they are not a sinner or a relatively good person.

In the first chapter of Romans, just after Paul talks about the depravity of mankind, he goes on to warn those who may have fooled themselves into thinking that the wrath of God doesn't apply to them. To be clear everyone will face judgement, and against God's holy standards, no one deserves salvation. All of us are sinners. There are too many people in this world who compare themselves to others in order to make themselves feel better. We must understand that "others" are not the standard. Christ is. And compared to Him, we all fall short of "the glory of God". When we judge others, as the Jews judged the gentiles and then do the same things, we are only bringing wrath down upon ourselves.

Notice that Paul is not only condemning for judging but also for being guilty of the very things they are judging for. Maybe not the exact same sins but sinning against God either way.

I think we need to clear something up real quick to make sure we are all on the same page. Is judging the ability to detect right from wrong? No, scripture tells us we all have been given this ability. I am sure that we all have encountered someone who was in sin and when they were confronted about it, their response was "don't judge me". It is not judging if we are pointing out sin for what it is. Now what is judging is telling someone they are going to hell for, "you fill in the blank". That is not our job, our job is to plead with them to repent of their sins before it is too late.

V2-3

Because we all fall short of perfection, we all will be judged. Who do you want deciding your eternity, an earthly judge who makes rulings on what he is told. Or maybe the criminal who is not allowed to even be a judge here on earth, one whose perception of right and wrong is already a little askew? I for one am glad to know that only God is qualified to make such an important decision! Isn't it great to know that Jesus came, lived a perfect life because He knew we couldn't. If it wasn't for that, all of mankind would be hopeless. There will be a day that the final judgment will come. On that day everyone will face one judgement or another.

Those who do not belong to Christ, well let's just say that they will not make it through this. Those found to be in Christ will have Jesus to intercede on their behalf allowing them to enter into heaven. Our only hope is Jesus, repentance and trusting in Jesus. Paul is directly talking to those living in depravity from chapter one.

"They are filled with all unrighteousness, evil, greed, and wickedness. They are full of envy, murder, quarrels, deceit, and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God haters, arrogant, proud, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, senseless, untrustworthy, unloving, and unmerciful." That is according to Romans 1:29-31. These people believe that

they are all right, they have normalized this lifestyle and so it is not wrong for them. We fall into the same issue as we see this list and then direct it onto others and fail to recognize the same shortcomings in our lives.

I'm sure there are folks out there who think that because they are saved that God overlooks these little infractions, that they do not define me because I am a good person. Right now, it would be a wonderful time for everyone to examine themselves. I'm not just talking about the unbelievers, but us Christians as well. We like to say we "were" sinners, but come on, yes, we "were" sinners, but we still are sinners. Just because our sins are blood covered by the only one who can wash us clean doesn't mean that we are sinless now does it? We must remember that we are blood bought otherwise we would deserve God's wrath like the world around us. How about we stop judging and condemning and instead fight to lead more lost people to Christ?

I love verse 3, **You** is emphatic in the question, "[do you think] **you will escape the judgment of God?**" Paul bears down here, letting his reader know that he is no exception to this principle. Paul knew how to get to the heart of his readers. Do we have any fishermen or fisherwomen in the room? Why is the hook not just a simple "J", why does it have the barb on it? To snag inside the mouth of the fish, right? Well, this is Paul's barb, to snag inside your heart. Do you really think you will escape the judgment of God?

When the world normalizes their sin, when they make it common to live that way. It is in some regard their way of feeling like they have escaped God's wrath. I'm sure that sometime throughout your life you have thought that someone else sinned against you and got away with it. But God's judgment will happen right on time, no one escapes His judgment. We often want instant vindication, we do not want to see them prosper, we want them to struggle, we want them not to be able to sleep at night. But God is so much better at this than we are, just trust Him to handle it. Do we have anyone here who is pretty patient?

I have to admit I struggle with patience; I saw a video this week, a father was going to teach his son a lesson about completing his tasks and doing his best. He took him out to the driveway where he had a pile of bricks. He told him to stack those bricks on the pallet on the other side of the driveway. The father came back about 20 mins later to see the boy had stacked several of the bricks on the pallet, but they were all crooked, and uneven. The father said no you can't stack them like that, here let me show you how to do it. Next thing he knows he is finished explaining how they needed to be stacked, now they are all stacked straight nice and neat and the pallet is full. Looking around his son was not even out there. I feel like God gets pretty impatient with me almost to the point of just doing it Himself too.

But God does not overreact like we do, He doesn't want to punish us, rather He gives us time to repent. It's when we keep pushing the limits that we are showing contempt for the riches of His kindness.

V4-5

I think I have mentioned this before, but I love it, there is a song that says, "we know the cost of everything, but we don't its worth" The word Paul uses here actually means to look down on something as if it has no value. Have you ever had someone ask you if you want the change they just got back from a cashier? I have had so many people tell me they don't carry change, they hate it in their pocket, they hate it in their cup holders in their cars. This is a great example of looking down on something as if it had no value. I don't know about here in Tennessee but in New Jersey I was taught about change in like 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, and how much each coin was worth. So, it is not that change is worthless, but more that people have decided that it is not worth the effort it takes to manage it.

So, what Paul is saying here is that the excuses we use, the thought that we do not need to repent is our way of devaluing God's grace. Do not forget that one unknown day...judgment is coming.

V6-8

Often times people will get this verse confused about what it really is. They think that it means that we can be saved by our deeds, if this was true then God would have a card for everyone. All I can imagine is a Yahtzee card with the list of deeds we needed to complete before we could get into heaven. Looking at the score, card do you think a 287 is good enough to get into heaven?

This is a fun way to reflect on the good we try to do, but in our relationship with God heaven is not something we earn by racking up points. This doesn't mean that deeds are not important, Paul is telling us that we will be judged by our deeds. Our deeds should be viewed as fruit of our transformed heart, not as a ticket in.

On one hand we see folks who are true believers of God, these are the ones Paul is referring to when he says, "by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, He will give eternal life". It is these who have the Holy Spirit in their lives that leads them to do all they can to bring honor and glory to Gods name. Did you catch that, we must be in Christ to have that desire to please God. We crave a lasting and meaningful life. We want to leave a legacy and make a mark. Life may be "but a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away", but it was never God's intention for you to be only a vapor. God's desire is for you to have a life of eternal significance.

Immortality or eternal life are things we lack, for we are all born under the sentence of death. The good news is that Christ Jesus has abolished the power of death and brought us eternal life. Eternal life is a gift we receive when we come to Christ. The moment you put your faith in Christ, you crossed over from death to life, and you will never perish. Eternal life is not merely endless life here on this ole raggedy earth; it is divine life lived in fellowship with the Lord. It is Christ's glorious life as opposed to the broken, short-lived life we inherited from Adam.

If on this hand, we have the redeemed then in this hand we most likely have those from the other side. Those who have chosen to reject God. Those who are selfishly ambitious to live for themselves and give no thought to the ways of God... Let's face it lost people act like lost people, just like you did while you were a foe of God. I do believe that if someone genuinely did good all the time, that God could merit that with eternal life.... But we know that we are all sinners and because all in some way or another, have been or will be self-seeking and will not obey the truth.

There are two translations of the word "obey", there is hypakouo (hoop a koo o) which means to heed or listen. Then there is peitho (pay tho) which means to be persuaded by the truth. Sometimes it is used as convinced.

Back to the judging thing we are not to judge people for their wrong doings but instead in a loving and compassionate way show them the truth of the gospel. If they choose to believe that they are not that bad and their deeds will stand as payment for their entrance into heaven, then God will judge them accordingly.

The final words of verse 8 are wrath and anger. The wrath of God refers to the self-inflicted destruction of our humanity that occurs when we reject God and live contrary to his ways. Wrath is controlled and deliberate, it is planned. It is the result of doing evil without respect. While anger is a sudden and intense outburst, it is passionate and volatile. The destructive consequences of humanity's rebellion are both immediate and delayed.

V9-11

God is not partial. His judgment is perfectly fair and not affected by a person's wealth, color, age, race, position, or status. So why then does it say first to the Jews? Because the Jews had the law, they understood the consequences of breaking it. From a young age, they learned about the wages of sin. So, if a Jew knows the law and decides to break it, there will be a greater consequence.

Image one of your kids has a friend for a sleep over. You tell them good night, giving your child the look, basically telling them to behave without embarrassing them in front of their friend. Only to wake up in the morning to a huge mess in the kitchen. I mean spilt drinks, half eaten

bowl of cereal on the table, the fridge door left wide open for God only knows how long. And you are blown away, the only answer that could possibly make this even bearable is if the friend sleepwalks. As you barge through the bedroom door you find candy wrappers surrounding both kids, they are still awake playing some zombie game, and you come unglued. During the interrogation you find out that both your spouse's child and the friend participated in these heinous acts. Who would get into more trouble, the one that lives in your house and who was raised to know better, or the visitor who clearly has no rules at their house? Don't be bias now!

World judges can't help but be biased. Lawyers in the US have a role in selecting juries, they explain the process of striking those they think may be biased and pushing for certain ones they think may be favorable to their cause. Many innocent people have been condemned because of public opinion against them when they did nothing wrong, the most famous of which is Jesus. One hundred years ago, it would be virtually impossible for a black person in the US to get a fair trial by an impartial judge, especially in the South. Often times we've seen athletes and movie stars are almost given free passes because of their famous status. Rich people who can bribe judges to get out of trouble.

This world is not always fair, but God is. You can't bribe Him. You don't get a free pass because you are rich or famous or powerful. But being poor is not an excuse either. Every person will be held responsible for their own actions and dealt with accordingly. This is the apocalyptic reckoning, where God will finally repay every person who harmed others and got off with no consequences here on earth. But no one is innocent. There is only one way to get a "not guilty" verdict. You need a relationship with the Judge's Son.

V12-16

Everyone has a conscience that tells us what is right and wrong. God has put the basic principles of His Law in our hearts. This is how even unbelievers naturally know what is right and wrong. This is supported by the fact that cultures around the world all have similar morals. Governments will forbid murder, lying and stealing and most individuals will recognize that these are wrong. It doesn't mean they will always follow it, and they will also offer excuses for doing it, but they will hold the people around them to this standard.

For example, parents and employers around the world will not want their children or employees to lie to them. Why? Because they know lying is bad. Same is true about many other sins. This conscience can be twisted or even seared by enough sinful input. But it is still a great blessing from God, especially when it is reinforced with Scriptural intake. It is like a spiritual warning system. Guilt is to our spiritual side like pain is to the physical side. Our conscience will give us warnings in our minds before we sin, and if that is not enough it will

make us feel guilty afterward. The purpose is to teach us to avoid it but if we fall into it, to repent.

When the Lord returns, our true hearts will be revealed. Our public image will count for nothing. It won't matter whether or not we were moral or law-abiding. The only thing that will matter is how we responded to Jesus. Did we respond to the grace of God with gratitude and faith? Or did we show contempt for the riches of his kindness?

There is coming a day, when *God* will judge everyone. Which judgment will you face?