

GOD'S RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT

Romans 2:1-3:20

Key Verse: 2:5

“But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.”

In the last passage we learned that our God, who is so gracious and kind, is also righteous. In his righteousness, he reveals his wrath against all the godlessness and wickedness of people. People become godless and wicked when they neither glorify God as God nor thank him. Then they make a society that is perverse and destructive. In a word, a world without faith is like hell. Therefore, we must live by faith.

Today Paul explains that God is the righteous Judge who holds all men accountable at the judgment. At that time, the excuses of the clever will not avail them. The justification of the intellectual will not help him. All men will stand guilty before God. From a sinner’s point of view, it is not good news. But from God’s point of view, it is absolutely necessary. God’s righteous judgment brings true justice to his creation. God’s righteous judgment vindicates his holy and righteous character. God’s righteous judgment is the foundation of a new heaven and a new earth. May God help us to accept God’s righteous judgment and seek his mercy.

First, God’s righteous judgment will be revealed (2:1-5).

After hearing Paul’s scathing indictment against mankind in 1:18-32, most people are appalled. In their sense of righteous indignation, they are ready to condemn others, standing on the side of God. But in this section, Paul turns his attention from godless sinners to religious sinners, those ready to pass judgment on others.

Look at verse 1. “You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.” Passing judgment is to declare condemnation and pronounce a sentence. Passing judgment is different from discerning between right and wrong. Only God has the right to judge men. Those who judge and condemn others are violating the spiritual order of the universe by putting themselves in God’s place. Moreover, we human beings are all sinners. One who condemns another is really condemning himself. There was a famous televangelist. Upon hearing about the sexual misconduct of a fellow televangelist, he began to denounce and condemn him. Shortly after, he was found to be the same kind of sinner.

Look at verse 2. “Now we know that God’s judgment against those who do such things is based on truth.” This is really a profound and meaningful statement: “God’s judgment...is based on truth.” Simply speaking, God knows the truth about everything. In the first place, God knows the facts. In the recent murder trial of O.J. Simpson, expensive lawyers raised so much doubt about the way evidence was gathered that the facts of the case became obscure. But this never happens with God. God knows all the facts. The Bible says that God knows the number of hairs each person has on his head (Lk 12:7). God knows who killed JFK. God knows where Osama is hiding. God knows everything. In the second place, God knows the motives of the heart. Understanding the true motives of another person is difficult for anyone. But God knows perfectly. In 1 Chronicles 28:9 David says, “...for the LORD searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts.” In the third place, God does not show favoritism. Men are all biased and prejudiced. For example, in 1963 there was a trial in the South for the murder of Medger Evers, a black civil rights activist. There was clear evidence that Byron de la Beckwith, a member of the Ku Klux Klan, was the murderer. Nevertheless, Beckwith was freed by an all-white jury. In 1990, Beckwith was retried, convicted, and imprisoned. In that case, justice was over 20 years late due to human prejudice. But God does not show favoritism. God always gives the right verdict, based on truth.

Look at verse 3. “So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them, and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God’s judgment?” Sinful human beings think that if they make enough noise about others’ sins, they can obscure the truth about their own sins. Even children know how to do this. To avoid punishment, they talk about all the wrongdoing of their siblings. Sometimes it works. But not with God. God is never diverted from giving a right judgment against those who speak well about others’ wrongdoing.

Look at verse 4. “Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness leads you toward repentance?” As we have thought about, God knows everything and is not fooled by anything. However, he does not punish men moment by moment as our sins deserve. Rather, God is kind. In Matthew 5:45, Jesus said, “He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” In Acts 14:17, Paul told the idol worshiping people of Lystra, “He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.” God works hard every day to provide all necessary things for people’s happiness. People don’t deserve it at all. It is the sheer kindness and grace of God. But sinful men do not thank God for his kindness. Sinful men do not realize that God’s kindness should lead toward repentance. Instead of repenting, they take God’s kindness as approval of their sinful lives. This, in fact, is showing contempt for God’s kindness.

There is a story about the sun and the wind. They decided to have a contest to see who could get a man to take off his coat. The wind blew and blew. But the harder it blew, the more tightly the man wrapped his coat around him. Finally, the wind had to give up. It was the sun’s turn. The sun quietly shone its light on the man. Steadily and continually, the sun warmed the man until he stretched and yawned. A few minutes later, he took off his coat. In the same way, God shows kindness to sinful mankind to lead us to repentance.

However, sinful man abuses God’s kindness. Look at verse 5. “But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.” Instead of repenting, men become stubborn. Here, stubbornness is the insistence that one is right when he is wrong; it is a refusal to listen to God and receive correction. It is a refusal to examine oneself in light of God’s word and to acknowledge sin. It is a refusal to admit a debt to God or to yield one’s self to God’s control. It is a refusal to acknowledge God as the Sovereign Ruler of one’s personal life. What happens to such a person? He stores up wrath against himself. His punishment accumulates moment by moment, day by day. It is good to save money in the bank or to store up goodwill in business. But to store up wrath is not good.

Look at verse 5 again. “But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.” There will be a day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. Paul clearly says that on that day, the wrath of God that has been accumulating will be poured out in a full satisfaction of justice. This is hard for us to imagine and it is hard for us to accept. We don’t like to stand before a traffic court judge. But on the day of God’s wrath, all the unrepentant will be dealt with by God. Paul calls this God’s righteous judgment. It is a final reckoning with men to settle accounts in full. To those without Christ, it is a terrible day. On that day, all the deadbeat dads will be held accountable with no escape. On that day all terrorists will be brought to justice. However, the final result of God’s righteous judgment is glorious. 2 Peter 3:13 says, “But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.” St. Paul looked forward to that day, saying in 2 Timothy 4:8, “Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”

We must accept God’s righteous judgment by faith. Only when we believe God’s righteous judgment can we have healthy faith. The theme of many Psalms is, “Why do the wicked prosper?” Another theme is, “Why do those who fear God suffer unbearably?” When we think only about our lives in this world, we can never answer these questions. It causes some to doubt God’s existence. We must know that there will be a final judgment of God in absolute righteousness.

Second, God’s standard of judgment (6-16).

Look at verse 6. “God will give to each person according to what he has done.” In this verse we learn several things about the standard of God’s judgment. First of all, each person must stand alone before God to be judged. At that time, friends and family members cannot intervene for us before God. One person always depended on his mother to bail him out of trouble, even with his teachers. But on that day, his mommy cannot intervene for him. Each person must stand alone before God as an individual. Each person will be held accountable for his own words and deeds. Secondly, God gives reward and punishment according to what each person has done. This means that God sees the facts and especially the deeds of each person. There is an expression, “The road to hell is paved with good intentions.” We have many good intentions. We intend to study hard. We intend to watch only one hour of television a day. We intend to be diligent in feeding sheep. And so on. But God does not judge according to our good

intentions. God judges based on the facts. One girl was told many times to turn in her scholarship application before the deadline. She intended to. She really did. However, she was late. As a result, she failed to get a scholarship, though she qualified academically. When her parents appealed for her, they were told that she was late and the fact was the fact.

In addition to the facts, God also sees the motives of the heart. Look at verses 7-8. "To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger." God sees what each person seeks. Basically there are two kinds of people: those who seek to please God and those who seek to gratify themselves. To pass God's judgment a person must seek to please God from the beginning of his life to the end and with this motivation he must do good and only good all the days of his life. There is only one who has done this. He is Jesus Christ. Jesus said in John 8:29, "The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him." Jesus is the standard for judgment. All others fail to meet God's righteous standard.

Third, God is fair in his judgment to both Jew and Gentile (12-16).

Look at verse 12. "All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law." Those "who sin apart from the law" refers to the Gentiles. Paul says that they will perish apart from the law. God does not need to refer to the law to judge them justly. Verse 15 says that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts; they have consciences. Yet they fail to live up to their own conscience or moral standard. So they are guilty and deserve God's judgment. The Jews may seem to have an advantage because they know the law. But knowing the law does not save them from God's judgment. It is only those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. Because Jews don't obey the law, they deserve God's judgment. Both Gentile and Jew alike are under the power of sin. God's righteous judgment against both is absolutely fair and just.

Look at verse 16. "This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares." Here, again, Paul talks about the day of God's judgment. On that day, God will judge men's secrets. Jesus said that there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open (Lk 8:17). At the judgment all the secrets of men's hearts will be made known. The Judge is Jesus Christ. The standard is Jesus Christ. With everything laid bare before Christ, no one can pass God's judgment. While Jesus walked the earth, he was once put into a corner by the Pharisees. They brought to him a woman caught in the act of adultery and tried to pressure him to agree to stoning her. Then Jesus knelt down and wrote something on the ground. It may have been the secret sins of the Pharisees. After a few moments, Jesus stood up and said, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her" (Jn 8:7). Then, one by one, they left him, the older ones first. No one could claim to be righteous in the presence of Christ.

Fourth, "practice what you preach" (17-24).

In verses 17-24, Paul deals with the problem of the Jews who exalted themselves because of their knowledge of the law and because they were in the position of teachers. God had marvelous grace upon the Jews to give them the law. Through the law they could have a covenant relationship with God. They could discover the will of God. They could realize what is superior and approve of it. God wanted to use them as Bible teachers and shepherds for the whole world. But they did not have a shepherd heart for others. What is more, they did not obey the law that they taught. They were hypocritical and overbearing. They used their knowledge of the law to crush others. But they themselves were the same sinners. When their own hypocrisy was exposed, the result was that God's name was dishonored. This continues to happen in our time when Christians condemn unbelieving people and then do the same things themselves. One of the most common excuses that people make for not attending a church worship service is that the church is full of hypocrites. And they are right.

Fifth, circumcision is circumcision of the heart (25-29).

In verses 25-29, Paul deals with the issue of circumcision. Some of the Jews depended on circumcision for their righteousness. But without obedience to the law, circumcision has no value. God sees the contents of one's life, not his practice of rituals. Look at verses 28-29. "A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God."

Sixth, there is no one righteous (3:1-20).

Look at 3:1-2. “What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God.” If the Jews had accepted the word of God by faith and obeyed it, they would have gained eternal life. They would have pleased God. But the history of Israel shows that by and large, they failed to do so. God called them to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. But they did not become so. Some wanted to claim that God failed. Paul says, “Not at all!” In fact, the failure of the Jews revealed that God is faithful. It is because God promised them not only blessings for obedience, but punishment for disobedience. God kept his promise.

So some people thought that since their unrighteousness brought out God’s righteousness more clearly, they should not be judged by God. After all, they revealed God’s glory. If we pursue this line of thought it leads to the preposterous conclusion, “Let us do evil that good may result.” Some young people think that only those who sin greatly against God can know his grace. They think they must become terrible sinners. As Paul says, “Their condemnation is deserved.”

Look at verses 9-10. “What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. As it is written: ‘There is no one righteous, not even one....’” The conclusion of this matter is that all men suffer from the sickness of sin. Men under the power of sin cannot meet God’s righteous standard. Therefore, there is no one who can stand before God on the judgment day and pass his righteous judgment.

Look at verses 19-20. “Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.” Men who are sinners before the holy God should be quiet. We should stop making excuses. We should stop trying to justify ourselves. We must admit that we are sinners who deserve God’s righteous judgment. Only when we come to God as sinners can we receive his grace of salvation.

May God help each of us to repent of making excuses and claiming self-righteousness. “Lord, I am a sinner. Have mercy on me.”