

God Has No Favourites

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[0 : 00] which is on page 1129, I think, page 1129, Romans chapter 2, verses 1 to 16.

Page 1129, if you're using a red-covered Bible, Romans chapter 2, verses 1 to 16, and Joe is going to read that for us now.

God's righteous judgment. 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 thing.

Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same thing, do you think you will escape God's judgment?

Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance? 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.

[1 : 27] God will give each person according to what he has done. 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. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil, first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

But glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good, first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism. 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. For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.

Indeed, when Gentiles who do not have the law do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law.

[2 : 34] Since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.

This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares. Thanks very much, Joe.

Well, please keep your Bibles open on that section there. There are some sheets going around. If you haven't got one, I think there's some at the front there.

You can take notes. And there's a pen as well. If you'd like one of them, you can stick your hand up and we'll get it to you. We are going through the Book of Romans.

We're starting into Chapter 2. Yesterday evening, I was at a school reunion, a 20-year school reunion, and I was chatting to my friends, a lot of them discovering for the first time that I was a pastor.

[3 : 39] Some of them were quite shocked for the fact that I was doing that. And I said, well, if you want to know what it's like, you can always go online and listen to the sermons and have a listen, and I'd welcome your feedback.

You can get back to me. And then I remembered what I was actually going to be talking about this morning, God's judgment. That's a scary one, isn't it? I thought, oh dear. Maybe if they don't listen to that and they listen to something a little bit more lighter, it might be better.

But nevertheless, it's God's Word, and we deal with it as these difficult subjects come up. And, well, we need God's help for this. So let's pray and ask for God to help us to get an understanding of these big things.

Let's pray together. Our Father, we thank you for having your Word in our language, having it written down that we can read, having people who can help us to understand it.

But most of all, we need the help of your Holy Spirit. Because without your Spirit, it's as if we are deaf, or we are blind to it.

[4 : 53] We cannot understand or comprehend it. So we pray that by your Spirit, you will speak to us, helping us to grasp these big subjects, how it applies to our life and the world in which we live.

And we pray that we would take it seriously and understand its impact. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

So tell me, are you looking forward to the big day? We've already had some big days this week. Last Sunday, Cork won the All-Ireland.

After 20 years, they brought back Sam, the great big cup, back to Cork. That was a big day, wasn't it? On Thursday, we celebrated Arthur's Day.

Maybe some of you did anyway. 250 years of Guinness in Ireland. That was a big day. But what's the big day that we're all looking forward to?

[6 : 04] For some here, it might be, well, you're starting back to college tomorrow. It could be a new job. For some people, it could be their wedding day that they're looking forward to. What's the big day?

Well, in the Bible, the big day always refers to the day of God's judgment. Look at verse 6. It says there, God will give to each person according to what they have done.

Verse 16. This will take place on the day when God will judge people's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

Do you have any secrets? Something that you did that no one else knows about. Not even your wife or your husband or your closest friend.

A deeply held secret. Well, on the day of judgment, nothing will be hidden. It's like our whole life has been recorded from beginning to end, and it will be played back before us.

[7 : 18] Every action, every thought, every single word, nothing will be off limits. And if we could imagine ourselves sitting there, watching this recording of our whole life, there will be moments where we will be very proud.

The way we helped that friend who was very sick. The money that you gave to support that child in compassion. The way you raised and cared for your children over so many years.

And those countless acts of kindness towards a stranger. There will be so much that you will be proud of. And then as the video goes on, there will be moments you will be very ashamed of.

You'll be sitting squirming in your seat. That broken friendship that is never the same again because of what we said. The extra money that we kept because we fiddled our accounts.

The times that we lost our temper with our kids or spoke an unkind word to our spouse. The lie that we told to our boss just so they didn't find out.

[8 : 33] This is the big day when each one of us will have to stand before God, the creator and the ruler of our lives, and we're going to have to give an account for how we have lived.

Now before we look at this in more detail and get into the text, I want to address what I think is a very common question.

And it goes something like this. People ask it. They'll say, how can a loving God be a judging God? There's a bit of a contradiction there. Loving and judging don't go together.

We all like the idea of a loving God. Somebody who cares for us, who provides for us, who wants us to be happy in life. But when we talk of a God who judges, well, we react against it.

Some time ago, I attended the funeral of somebody who had lived the life full of crime and full of violence. In fact, they died a very violent death. And no doubt, they had lots of acts of love and kindness, but much of their life left people broken, hurt, and in fear.

[9 : 44] And at the funeral, they spoke of the person in glowing terms. And they celebrated the fact that he was now in heaven with the angels.

You see, the assumption was that God is so loving that he lets people off the hook. He's kind of portrayed as some kind of sympathetic grandfather sitting in his rocking chair who pretends not to see what is really going on.

But that's a contradiction to love, isn't it? If God is a God of love, he can't ignore evil. He doesn't turn a blind eye to the hurt and the damage that is caused.

He demands justice. He demands fairness. What kind of loving God would sit back and ignore sin and pretend that, well, it doesn't really matter what people do?

You see, not to judge would be very unloving. Not to impose justice would be very unkind.

[10 : 56] And in the Bible, God's judgment is always an expression of his love and his delight in his created world. He judges because evil destroys the harmony and the beauty of God's good world.

He judges because injustice breaks the peace and the happiness that God intends for his people. So the God of love is a God of judgment because he's determined and he's committed to put all the wrongs to right, to undo the brokenness that we see and experience in this world and to put it all together again.

So we must never see a contradiction between the God of love and the God who judges. Well, that's just a bit of an aside.

We need to get back into the text of chapter 2 and see what it is saying to us today. So, God's judgment is inescapable.

God's judgment might be a good thing, but as we're sitting here listening, we think, surely God isn't going to judge me. After all, I'm not really a bad person.

[12 : 15] Alright, I'm not perfect, but I'm not as bad as him and I am certainly not as bad as her. Well, look at verse 1 of chapter 2.

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.

Our Taoiseach Brian Cowan has had a rough couple of weeks, hasn't he? And according to public opinion, he should go. The last recent poll said there was only 11% of the population who wants him as leader.

His session at the Galway Think-In or what's been nicknamed the Drink-In and the way he conducted himself afterwards was dismissing the nation as if to say, I don't care about your problems.

In the public's judgment, he should resign as leader. But the question that I would like to ask is this. how many people in this country, how many people in this room have had a bad day at work who haven't been able to function properly because of too much Arthur Guinness the night before?

[13 : 43] We really shouldn't throw stones in glass houses. You see, what Paul is doing here is tackling the good-living moralistic person.

The person who thinks, I'm alright, Jack. You see, back in chapter 1 verses 18 to 32, Paul had been listing the various kinds of people that God is going to judge.

So I want us to imagine the church scene. We have a family who arrive into the church and they take their seat in the pew. Mr. and Mrs. Good will call them and their son Pius and their daughter Superior.

And there they are sitting, nicely dressed with their Bibles listening to the letter of Romans being read out. And it gets to verse 24 of chapter 1.

Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. Sexual impurity. They deserve to be judged.

[14 : 48] Dreadful people, you know. I wouldn't do that sort of thing. The sermon goes on. They get to verse 26, chapter 1. Because of this, God gave them over to the shameful lust.

Those people, they ought to be damned as well. Go on, Paul. Preach it, Paul. That's right, Paul. Destroy those terrible people and may God deal with their gross behaviour.

But what Paul is doing is building them up with a false sense of security and superiority. Because as the sermon moves on, he gets very, very personal.

He begins to list others who are going to be judged. Look at the end of verse 29. The very last one, he talks about people who gossip. And Mr.

and Mrs. Good look at each other in the pew and go, oh, that's me. I gossip. The sermon goes on to the end of verse 30 and he talks about people who disobey their parents.

[15 : 49] And pious and superior look at each other and go, oh, that's us too. And in a devastating blow, they find themselves entrapped.

Chapter 2, 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.

Now, he's not saying that we all behave in exactly the same way and we all get up to the same kinds of things. Rather, he's saying at one point or another, every single one of us fail and fall.

God doesn't grade sin. it will all be treated in the same way, whether you have had an affair or whether you have gossiped. His judgment is so pointed that it is inescapable for everyone.

Verse 2. Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. There's been lots of rumors, hasn't there, depending on the paper you read, about Brian Cowan.

[17 : 11] I haven't a clue how many pints he had. I don't know what time he went to bed at and I don't even know what time he got up at. And I don't think you know either.

None of us know. The same as I don't know what you were doing this weekend and you don't know what I was doing at my 20-year reunion. But God does because God sees and as it says here in verse 2, God is a God of truth.

Verse 3. So when you, a mere man, just an ordinary Joe blog, pass judgment on them and yet you do the same things, do you really think that you're going to escape God's judgment?

You see, on the big day there's going to be no cover-ups, there's going to be no spin, no excuses, nowhere to hide, everything will be uncovered, everything will be laid bare and our superior judgmental attitudes of others are only going to condemn us.

His judgment is inescapable, especially, especially for those who think themselves better or superior to other people.

[18 : 39] But thankfully, God's judgment is also delayed. Look at verse 4. Do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, his tolerance and his patience, not realising that God's kindness leads you towards repentance?

Jesus. The other Friday evening in the back room there at our Crusader youth group, I sat round a table with some of the lads.

We have a Bible discussion and they're always wanting to try and catch you out with difficult questions. So one of them said to me, Johnny, God doesn't like people doing bad things, does he?

No, I said he doesn't. Well then, if he's God, why doesn't he stop all the evil in the world? And with that he turned round and he slapped his friend on the back of the head.

And then he continued, if God is true, he'd stop me, wouldn't he? And then he slapped his friend again. As if to say, you see, if God is there, if God took sin seriously, he'd do something about it.

[19 : 50] Because he isn't, he's not there. Well, I wasn't quick enough in my answer. This is the verse I should have said or pointed to, verse 4 of chapter 2.

You see, God will one day judge, but he's holding back on his judgment because of his kindness and patience. We all deserve to be judged right now and removed from God's good world because we've all messed it up, we've all played our part in it.

But God is long suffering, and he's withholding his judgment for a reason. Look at the end of verse 4. Do you not realise that God's kindness, that's his tolerance and his patience, is to lead you towards repentance?

Tolerance means time. Time to repent. Time to do business with God. Time to sort our lives out before it's too late.

Of course, if we go around slapping people across the head and ignore God's kindness, then we're going to have to face the consequences, verse 5. But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself.

[21 : 12] For the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. They're tough words, aren't they?

Picture in your minds for a minute a great big dam at the top of a valley. Year after year as the rains fall and the waters flow down into it, the water builds up and it builds up and the pressure continually increases behind the dam.

And while the dam is managing to hold the waters back, sooner or later the dam is going to crack, the dam is going to burst and the water is going to come flooding down the valley, destroying everything in its path.

Well, it's like God is holding back the water of his wrath and judgments. You see, every time we ignore his kindness, every time we turn our back on his patience and go on living as we please, the pressure is increasing.

It's building up, it's building up. As it says in verse 5, we are storing up wrath. And eventually the pressure will be so great that it's going to burst and God's judgment will be revealed.

[22 : 38] God's kindness. Now, there's only two possible responses to God's kindness. I haven't had it on the screen here, but the first response is this, to be repentant believers.

Look at verse 7. It says there, to those who by persistence in doing good, seek glory, honour and immortality, he will give eternal life.

Now, we mustn't get confused here. This is not rewards for our performance, but the results of our repentance.

It's not because we've done good things that God gives us eternal life, but because of our repentance and repentance always leads to, or it is always demonstrated by our good works.

God gives us. And the person who does that, it says there in verse 7, he will give eternal life. They will be part of his new kingdom. The other response is to be those who reject the truth, verse 8.

[23 : 46] But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, in other words, for the person who is unrepentant, there will be wrath and anger.

His judgment is coming. What's it going to be? Repentance or rejection? What is your destiny going to be?

Okay, you say, so God is going to judge. I've got that worked out. He's also very patient. He's giving us time. I've got that figured out. But I've got a clever question for you now, Johnny.

What if I know nothing about God? Then what? Well, look at verse 11. It tells us that God does not show favouritism.

In other words, that he's very fair. But how can God be fair, Johnny? What about all those people that never heard of Jesus? Or what about all those people who've never been to church?

[25 : 00] And you know what? I've never read my Bible. You can't be judged on what you don't know, can you? Well, that question is answered for us in verse 12.

It says there, all who sin, apart from the law, apart from God's word, will also perish, apart from God's word.

verse 14. Indeed, when Gentiles, that's the kind of summary word for anybody who isn't a Jew, indeed, when Gentiles who do not have the law, do not have God's word, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law.

Now, that's kind of quite difficult. We'd have to read that a few times, and still we're kind of struggling to understand it. I listened to a very good illustration on this. Tim Keller quoted Francis Schaeffer.

Francis Schaeffer was one of the great Christian thinkers and writers, and he describes this section here in Romans as what he calls the invisible tape recorder.

[26 : 15] He says every single person, imagine he says that every single person in the world has an invisible tape recorder strapped around their necks. So right now, all of us have this invisible tape recorder.

You might look, but it's not there because it's invisible. It is there, but it's invisible. You can't see it. And on judgment day, everybody will be brought before God.

And of course, there'll be people there who will say, okay God, I'm here, but I didn't know you were going to be here. Nobody ever told me that there was a God.

I never had a Bible. Nobody took me to Sunday school. I never went to church. You can't judge me. I didn't know. And then God reaches forward and he takes off the invisible tape recorder.

So I didn't know it was there. Well, no, of course you didn't because it was invisible. But he makes it visible and you see this tape recorder. And God says to you, I want you to know that I am very, very fair.

[27 : 17] I'm a just God. So I'm not going to judge you by what you don't know, but what you do know. I'm not going to judge you by the Bible because you never read it.

I'm not going to judge you by Jesus Christ because you never heard about him. I'm going to judge you by your own standards or by your own conscience.

Look at verse 15. Since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences, also bearing witness and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.

You see, we've all got a conscience and our conscience, no matter who we are, tells us that's right or that's wrong. God says, so when we take off this recorder, God says, it's recorded every single time you have said to somebody else, you should have done that.

You shouldn't have done that. You ought to have said that. God says, I'm going to judge you by the standard that you judge others.

[28 : 37] Now that's completely fair. Now that's a big problem, isn't it? Because I can't even live up to my own standards, let alone God's standards.

How many times have I told my kids, stop being grumpy and don't be rude? I'll not tell you how many times I'm grumpy and rude.

You see, it's back to verse 1 again, isn't it? You, therefore, have no excuse. You who pass judgment on someone else, every time you start pointing fingers at other people, you're judging yourself.

You're condemning yourself because you who pass judgment, you do exactly the same things. You see, no matter who we are, whether we're judged by God's law or by our own heart law, whether we're irreligious people or religious people, whether we've read our Bibles or haven't read our Bibles, we will all discover that we're all guilty and that we deserve to be judged.

You see, God's fairness is not a problem. The problem is with our own stubborn and rebellious hearts. So if God's judgment is completely fair, what hope is there going to be for any of us, because we're all going to be found wanting.

[30 : 05] Well, the Bible does talk about a day of judgment to come, but it also talks about a day of judgment that has passed. This day is the day when Jesus died on the cross.

On the cross, Jesus takes the judgment that you and I deserve. Remember that imagery of the dam and the river? Well, it's like Jesus is standing in front of that dam, and the wrath of God that is stored up for us has been poured out on Jesus.

Instead of crashing and flowing over us, it falls onto Christ, and it is absorbed completely onto Christ, and all those who stand behind him, all those who put their faith and have repented and stand in the security of the cross, the judgment flows past.

We are protected and kept safe, so we no longer need to fear God's judgment, now or in the future. Instead, we live with the freedom that all our sin has been dealt with.

Now, if we begin to apply this to our lives, it's not just going to be a wonderful idea, but it's going to change us on the inside out. In two ways, and we see this on the screen here.

- [31 : 43] The first way is that I will no longer judge myself. Because Jesus is judged instead of me, I no longer look down at myself and beat myself up when I fail and fall.

Do you do that? When you fail and fall, do you look at yourself and go, you're so bad, Johnny, you're so awful, you might as well give up the Christian life because you're just a waste of space and you keep getting it wrong all the time.

Give up. Satan comes alongside and he reminds me of what I've said and what I've done. And being at a 20 year reunion, there were lots of stories to remind me of what I've done.

What do I do? I look to the cross and I see Christ and I see that the judgment has fallen on him. I'm no longer condemned.

I've been set free. I'm a child of God, treasured and loved by him. So I no longer have to judge myself because Christ has been judged instead of me.

- [32 : 52] And the second thing is I no longer need to judge others. Because Jesus is judged instead of me, I no longer look down on others because now I see that I'm actually no different to anybody else.

when I see people sin, when I see people fail and fall, I'm no longer pointing the finger at them saying, they're so bad, they deserve God's judgment.

I'm no longer pointing the finger, instead I'm pointing them to the cross. I'm pointing them towards Jesus and I'm saying, Jesus can take your judgment too.

truth. So it changes how I look at myself and it changes how I look at other people as well. When we look at Christ, it transforms our outlook in every way.

Turn with me please to Romans chapter 14. As we close, I just want to read these few verses. Romans chapter 14, just a couple of pages on and verse 9.

- [34 : 04] And as we read this, I just want us to reflect and personally respond to what we hear.

We'll just take a minute silence, having read it, for us to reflect upon what we see here. Romans chapter 14, verse 9. It says this, for this very reason, Christ died and returned to life, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

You then, why do you judge your brother? Why do you look down on your sister?

For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. God's heart. It is written, as surely as I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow before me and every tongue will confess to God.

So then each of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore, let us stop passing judgment on one another.

- [35 : 19] God's heart. Let's just take a minute to reflect and to respond in our own hearts to God. God's heart. Let's God's heart.

God's Our Father God, we thank you so much for Jesus.

We have that picture in our minds of that dam, that river, it bursting forth. We picture Christ who has absorbed the judgment for us, so that we can be set free, so that we can be your children.

We thank you that because of Jesus that we can truly look forward to the day of judgment, because it is a day when you will welcome us into your eternal kingdom.

We will live with you forever. We will stand there not on the basis of our performance or our goodness, but we will point to Christ, and we will say Christ has done it for me.

[37 : 07] We thank you, Jesus, so much. Please, Father, we ask that you would work this truth into our lives as we go about this week, and when we fail, because we're all going to slip and fall up this week, we would not start judging ourselves, but we would look straight to Christ and remember that he has been judged.

We're no longer condemned. And when we're with our friends and with family and they say or do something that's wrong, help us not to be judgmental, but instead gently and graciously help us to point them to the cross and show them that Jesus has taken their judgment too.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.