

(3) Why morality isn't enough

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[0 : 0 0] So this morning's reading is Romans chapter 2, verses 1 to 16, and this is on page 1132. Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges.

For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you the judge practice the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who do such things.

Do you suppose, O man, you who judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

But because of your hard and impenitent heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

He will render to each one according to his works. To those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.

[1 : 1 2] But for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek.

But glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality. For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.

For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. For when Gentiles who do not have the law by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law.

They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

Richard, thanks very much for reading to us. Please would you keep Romans open. It's on page 1132, if you've closed your Bibles, as we continue our series in Romans.

[2 : 3 9] But before we begin, I'm going to pray and ask for God's help this morning, not only to understand his word, but that we might be changed and transformed by it. So let's pray together.

Amen. Heavenly Father, we've been thinking this morning about the reality of judgment. We praise you that you are indeed God.

And we praise you also that you are the God who speaks. Thank you that you don't keep these things in the dark from us. So we cry to you this morning as we look at Romans 2 together.

Please would you speak to us. We pray that your spirit would teach us, rebuke us, correct us, and equip us and transform us. And we ask it for Jesus' sake.

Amen. Now, after the floods in Australia last month, there was much soul-searching in the Australian press.

[3 : 41] And a couple of articles went like this. One of them said, this was an Australian-made disaster, which is a long time coming. We did really stupid things because we thought we could get away with them.

Another wrote, we built towns on floodplains. We concreted over watercourses. We built inadequate drains and bridges. We ignored at our peril the forces of nature and the history of the great floods, which have shaped our continents for thousands of years.

What were they saying? We ignored the warnings and we thought we could get away with it. Well, if you were here last week when we looked at Romans 1, verses 18-32, we saw why it is that it's only those who trust in Jesus Christ who are right with God.

Just turn back to Romans 1, verse 18, just so we can remind ourselves why that is. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

We saw, didn't we, that God is angry with everyone. We saw that none of us are by nature right with God. Indeed, that all of us are by nature wrong with God, in the wrong with God.

[5 : 16] But God knows the way in which many of us will have responded to hearing that. And it is by ignoring the warnings and by thinking we can get away with it.

After all, I guess many of us, perhaps even most of us, are fairly satisfied with what we might call our moral performance. Granted, we wouldn't get 100%, but nonetheless, we are much, much better, aren't we, don't we think, than many people we can think of.

And it's therefore to us that God speaks this morning, Romans chapter 2, verses 1 to 16. Let me just say the aim of all of Romans 2, and the first 20 verses of Romans 3, is to silence us.

You see, just have a look on to Romans 3, verse 19, where Paul concludes his whole argument of these first few chapters of the letter. Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

To silence our protests of innocence, so that we realise that whatever excuses we come up with in our own minds, that actually we too face God's anger.

[6 : 48] And therefore, of course, these chapters, however hard they are to hear, and they are hard chapters to hear, aren't they? It is out of love that God speaks them to us, so that we understand the situation we are in.

So that in turn, we grasp how wonderful it is to be right with God. So that in turn, we'll put our trust in Jesus, and his death for us.

Well, there's an outline of today's talk on the back of the note sheet, and I'll have to follow it. Do make notes if that's helpful. First of all, verses 1 to 5, God hears no excuses. God hears no excuses.

Now, I guess last week, as we looked at Romans 1, 18 to 32, many of us will have thought to ourselves, well, yes, actually, that is the world we live in, isn't it? It is the shocking way in which our society has drifted away from its Christian moorings, the binge drinkers, the greedy bankers, the corrupt politicians, the way in which the parents let their children run amok, falling moral standards, and so on.

Yes, they deserve God's judgment, all right? And that's when we need to hear verses 1 and 2. Therefore, you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges, for in passing judgment on another, you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things.

[8 : 18] We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who do such things. In passing judgment on others, we condemn ourselves, because, of course, the very fact that we pass judgment on others shows, doesn't it, that we do know what is right, and that we do know what is wrong, and yet we do the same things.

Of course, we're right to disapprove of what is wrong, we're right to disapprove of sin, but the danger is that as we do so, it simply leaves us feeling good about ourselves, rather than realizing that actually we do exactly the same things that we disapprove of.

We look at the sins of others, we look at the state of society, and we think we're not so bad after all. And God says, verse 3, Do you suppose, O man, or woman, you who judge those who do such things, and yet you do them yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God?

Don't think that you will escape. When we condemn others and look down on them, we condemn ourselves, because we do the very same things. We're so inconsistent, aren't we?

We judge the sins of others, but we excuse our own. When Rachel loses the car key, I get cross. When I lose the car key, I expect her to be understanding and sympathetic.

[9 : 44] These things just happen. In 1961, Yehiel Deneur was a witness during the trial of Adolf Eichmann, who himself was one of the organizers of the Holocaust.

Deneur had been a concentration camp survivor, and you can see him on the video on YouTube, entering the courtroom and staring at Adolf Eichmann behind bulletproof glass.

And of course, the question which the whole courtroom was asking was, how would he react when he met this man who had sent millions to their death?

Well, the court was hushed, and suddenly, Yehiel Deneur began to sob, and he collapsed onto the floor. Not out of anger, not out of bitterness, as we perhaps might have expected, but as he later explained in a television interview, what struck him at that instance was a terrifying realization.

He said this, I was afraid about myself. I saw that I am capable to do this, that I am exactly like he.

[11 : 03] Now, the reporter interviewing him understood precisely what he was saying. He said this, how is it possible for a man to act as Eichmann actors, he asked. Was he a monster? Was he a madman?

Or was he perhaps something even more terrifying? Was he normal? And Deneur replied, Eichmann is in all of us.

Well, Romans chapter 1, verses 18 to 32, is in all of us. We by nature turn our backs on God, we put other things in his place.

And that list of things which chapter 1 finishes with, in verses 29 to 31, that is in all of us. Just look at it. Verse 29, evil, evil, covetousness, malice, envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness, gossip, slander, hatred of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, and ruthless.

You see, we need to hear this because we are outwardly respectable. And therefore, of course, our danger is verse 4 of chapter 2.

[12 : 19] Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

You see, our danger, isn't it, is that we'll presume on God's riches and kindness. We look at how our life is going, we look at our bank balance, we look at how our career is going, we look at our lifestyle, and it doesn't look to most of us as if God is angry with us.

And the danger, therefore, is that we'll do nothing. No, don't let your success in this world fool you into thinking that God is pleased with you.

God hasn't judged yet, but his judgment will come. Verse 5. For because of your hard and impenitent heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

Don't be hard-hearted. The reason he hasn't returned yet to judge is because he is patient. It is because he longs that people will repent.

[13 : 28] But don't kid yourself that because you are moral and decent, that God is not angry with you. God hears no excuses. Secondly, verses 6 to 11, God has no favorites.

God has no favorites. Have a look at verse 11 because the point in this whole paragraph is simple. It is that God will judge fairly. And it's summarized for us in verse 11, for God shows no partiality.

Now, a number of us were asked to do a fascinating exercise in the forum back in the autumn. And as we sat around our tables, we were shown a whole bunch of photographs of famous people. And we were asked the question, if it was up to you, would you think they should go to heaven or would you think they should go to hell when they die?

Now, what struck me as we engaged in that process was how sort of arbitrary the whole process was. So, there was George Bush. Well, of course, it all seemed to depend on your political views.

There was Mother Teresa. But then we had a discussion about, well, was she a real Christian? Did she really know Jesus? And then there was Piers Morgan and we were divided.

[14 : 47] Yes, he's a bit of a rogue, we said, but he seems like a nice bloke. And I have to say that certainly on our table, we concluded that we are very glad the decision was not ours.

Because, of course, we wouldn't want, would we, our eternal destiny to be determined like that. And we want the final judgment to be fair. And that is just what we see here.

The final judgment will be fair. Because it is based on the lives we have lived. Verse 6. Have a look at verse 6. God will render to each one according to his works.

Now, that is consistent with the rest of the Bible. I put some verses there on the outline which you can chase up later on. The whole of the Bible is very clear that the basis of judgment on the final day is our works.

Now, I guess immediately at that point, some of us may kind of put a hand up and rejects and say, well, hang on a moment, what about salvation by faith, they say? Surely Paul is contradicting himself. But no, salvation is by faith as we'll see in a few weeks' time.

[15 : 56] But here he's talking about judgment where consistently God tells us it is based on the lives we have led. Because, of course, the life I live outwardly will reflect, won't it, what I am inwardly.

The real evidence for what I believe is always the life I live. And therefore, in verses 7-10, we're presented with two opposite ways of living.

They are two ways of treating God. Have a look at verse 7. This is the first way. It's living for God's honour, living for God's glory, living for him as the immortal God.

And the point being, of course, that none of us live like that. You see, just notice how those words, glory, honour, and immortality, how they echo exactly what we saw last week in verse 21.

They did not honour him as God. Or verse 23, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images. In other words, you see, when I'm tempted to think to myself, and of course, this is how we all naturally think, when I'm tempted to think to myself, well, I'll be alright, because I passed the good bloke test, and I'm not as bad as other people, I'm then meant to read verse 7 and conclude, well, actually, if that is the basis of judgment, then I haven't got a chance.

[17 : 33] I haven't got a chance. And then there's the way of verse 8, which is self-seeking and rejects God's truth.

And again, it echoes, doesn't it, what we saw last week. Unrighteousness, not obeying the truth, just what we saw in chapter 1, verse 18. The wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

God has no favourites. And again, you and I need to hear this, don't we, because most of us are respectable. And therefore, what do you notice, that there are no exceptions, verse 9.

Every human being. There are no exceptions, verse 10. Everyone. Now, many of us are even outwardly fairly upright and moral most of the time.

But of course, it's what I do the rest of the time, isn't it, that really gives the game away. You see, if 80% of my life, if for 80% of my life I live a fairly upright, decent, moral life, but then for 20% of the time, actually I disregard God because I think to myself, well I know better than God and I'll do things my way and not God's way, then who's in charge?

[19 : 09] Well, I'm in charge. And it's that 20% where God and I disagree, where I go my own way, that shows what I really think God is like.

It shows actually that verse 8 describes me perfectly. I'm self-seeking and the bottom line is how I want to live and I reject God's truth when it is convenient to do so and when I think he has got it wrong.

The basis of judgment is not how moral and upright we've been compared to others, but what our lives say about the way we have treated God.

God has no favourites. Thirdly, verses 12 to 16, you can't pull the wool over God's eyes because I guess some of us at this point may still well be thinking, well surely not, surely not me, surely not us.

And the point in verses 12 to 16 is simple, it is that you cannot fool God on the judgment day. You cannot pull the wool over his eyes. Now I've just been dipping into the biography of one of the British judges at the Nuremberg trials and this is what he writes as he talks about the way they set up the trials.

[20 : 30] He says this, to make the trial secure against all criticism, it must be shown to be fair, convincing, and built on evidence that cannot be shaken as the years go past.

And that is what we see here in verses 12 to 16. Just have a look at verse 12 as Paul addresses those who think they can pull the wool over God's eyes. Verse 12, for all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.

Now look, do you see the two types of people Paul is taking on? Notice there are those who have sinned without the law, in other words, those who don't have Bibles, who don't have knowledge of God's Word.

And notice there are those who have sinned under the law, in other words, those who do have Bibles, those who do have knowledge of God's Word. And to them, God says, to those who do have the Bible, who treasure it, who perhaps hear it in church every week, who value it, who say they believe in it, what does God say?

Verse 13, it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. Can you see what he's saying? Knowing the Bible is irrelevant.

[21 : 53] It's doing it that counts. And none of us can. We have no excuse. But surely we might think, those without a Bible, who have no knowledge of God's law, well, perhaps they can at least claim ignorance.

Well, no, have a look at verse 15. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.

In other words, everyone has a natural sense of what is right and what is wrong. After all, you don't need to use a Bible to show you that you shouldn't murder.

You don't need a Bible to tell you that stealing is wrong. You don't need a Bible to tell you that children should obey their parents. Now, everyone has a conscience of sorts. And yes, we may do good things, but there may be times when our consciences excuse us.

But the fact is, there are plenty of other times when our consciences condemn us. You cannot pull the wool over God's eyes.

[23 : 00] Because, notice verse 16, you see verse 16, what will the issue be on the judgment day? Not what I've been like on the outside. Not that I knew the Bible.

Not that I went to a Bible teaching church. Not that I lived an upright, decent life in the eyes of others. No, what will the issue be on the judgment day? verse 16, God will judge the secrets.

God will judge the secrets. And I take it, I take it, those of us who are still at this point insisting, well, all this talk of judgment, it's not for me.

I can see that it applies to other people, but it's not for me. I take it, it's at this point that we are meant to see that the game is up.

we may fool ourselves, we may fool others, but we cannot fool God. back in December when the world of international diplomacy was rocked by the publication of all those secret communiques on WikiLeaks, there was an uproar, wasn't there?

[24 : 15] As more than a quarter of a million confidential messages were posted on the website to the embarrassment of many world leaders. secrets. Now, one of the newspaper headlines simply proclaimed, all the way across the top of the newspaper, a world without secrets.

A world without secrets. And immediately there were attempts to close down the WikiLeaks website and arrest its founder because, of course, the idea of a world without secrets is not a comforting thing, is it?

It sparked a debate which still goes on. Do we really want a world without secrets? Because all of us have secrets.

The world is full of secrets. But your life and my life is full of secrets. But on the judgment day, verse 16, it's the secrets that will be judged.

You cannot pull the wool over God's eyes. And when you notice verse 16 that this is part of the gospel, it is part of the good news about Jesus Christ.

[25 : 25] Because, of course, it's only once we have really grasped the reality of judgment that we'll see how wonderful it is that Jesus Christ died on the cross so that we might be forgiven and right with God.

And we'll only see the urgency of getting right with God. By the way, it's why here at Grace Church we don't use the Alpha Course.

I know plenty of churches do use it. It's why we use Christianity Explored instead. Because the Alpha Course misses out on God's judgments. Whereas Paul is saying here, very clearly, isn't he, in verse 16, that judgment is part of the gospel.

If you miss out judgments, you're missing out part of the gospel. people. As I finish, let me tell you my fear this morning.

And my fear this morning is that those with tender consciences will leave in despair, while those with much harder consciences will leave unmoved. So let me address each in turn.

[26 : 34] First of all, those with tender consciences. God's promise is that we can be right with God. Indeed, that those who have put their trust in Jesus Christ are right with God.

Just turn back to Romans chapter 1, verse 16. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek, for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith.

Romans chapter 2 is not here to undermine your assurance if you put your trust in Jesus Christ. It is here to help us to grasp the depth of Christ's love for us and to understand more deeply what it is that Jesus has accomplished by his death through helping us to see how very serious our sin is and that there are no excuses.

But for those of us with much harder consciences, let me say it is very humbling, isn't it, for gifted, intelligent, middle class people to admit our sin and to recognise that however upright and moral we are in the eyes of others none of us are good enough for God.

I take it that is a very, very hard thing for us to admit. There will be a judgement day, God will act justly on that day as the secrets of our hearts are exposed.

[28 : 20] Which leaves us with a question. Do you really want justice on that day? Do you really want God to act justly towards you on that day?

Or would you much rather that he acted with mercy? That is the question to go away asking yourself. Do I really want God to act justly?

Or would I much rather he acted towards me with mercy? And may I say that all of us who have received God's mercy we need to hear this too if we are to be changed and transformed by the gospel.

Because it will humble us and it will stop us being judgmental. You see doesn't the world hate the judgmentalism and hypocrisy of the church?

And rightly so. Now remember Romans has written to a church that was divided between Christians who had come from a Jewish background and those who hadn't.

[29 : 25] Christians and so the barriers have inevitably gone up. And we have our own barriers don't we? They're different. Maybe that some people are different from me. Maybe that we look at others and perhaps think well why are they so half-hearted?

How can they bring up their children like that? How come they're not serving more in the church? How come they can justify spending their money on whatever they spent their money on? Very easy isn't it to be judgmental.

And of course at that point all the barriers go up and that is how a church becomes divided. They're understanding the fact that our sin is very serious.

It's only when we see the depth of our sin that we stop judging others. And of course that then is the route to harmony and unity in a local church.

church. And it's when we see our sin that our commitment to evangelism is also strengthened. Because of course as soon as we kind of adopt the tabloid mentality of being horrified by the world around us inevitably we pull up the drawbridge and we keep our distance.

[30 : 34] But no it's only sinners whose hearts have been changed by grace alone who will have the heart to take the gospel to others. I still remember the person who five years ago expressed surprise when I explained that we had just started a new church in Dulwich.

The implication being of course that respectable people don't need to hear the gospel. But sinners who have been changed by the gospel know that even the outwardly respectable are in desperate need of God's forgiveness.

And we'll take the gospel to them. Not in a judgmental way but in deep humility. Well why don't we have a few moments of quiet and then I'll lead us in prayer.

Amen. Therefore you have no excuse.

Heavenly Father we want to thank you that you are indeed God that there will be a judgment day that you will judge rightly and fairly on that day.

[32 : 09] And we know Heavenly Father in our hearts how naturally we excuse ourselves and so much of the time think of ourselves as being good upright people.

Therefore we thank you for the way in which you humble us and we pray that you would please continue to convict us of our sin and the reality of judgment that we might be those who are absolutely convinced our own minds of the wonder of what Jesus achieved on the cross by dying for us and that we would be a church family that would be marked not by division but by humility towards one another and the commitment to humbly offering the gospel to others and we ask it for Jesus' sake.

Amen.