

No Favoritism

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- [0 : 0 0] Often in the scriptures, the associated language and imagery of the judgment of God is thunder and lightning. So we'll see if in the next half hour, it sort of comes as an appropriate sideline to this passage from Romans chapter two.
- Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word, the gospel concerning your son, to make us wise for salvation, to bring us to the obedience of faith so that we may glorify you in our lives.
- We pray that your powerful gospel, of which Paul is unashamed, may indeed penetrate deeply into our hearts tonight so that we may stand justified and righteous in your sight through faith in Jesus Christ on the final day.
- Amen. Amen. Well, it's a favorite pastime of all of us. Such an arrogant person, we say so proudly.
- Oh, that person over there, they're so greedy. We usually say it covetously or enviously. They shouldn't spend their money on that. But again, it's our envy that is speaking.
- [1 : 1 6] She's such a gossip, we say. Rather annoyed because we're not in on the gossip. And so we indulge our favorite pastime.
- Casting stones. You see, we want the big business fraudsters to be brought to trial. But have we never cheated?
- We're adamant that a child murderer should face full justice of the courts. But have we never hated? There's the homophobic person who attacks homosexuals.
- The pro-life protester who uses violence to get their way or to protest. I remember when I lived in England, there was a shockingly tragic murder that was in the Australian papers, I'm sure, of a two-year-old boy killed by two teenagers out of Liverpool.
- Not all that far, really, from where I lived. The English were up in arms wanting to kill the murderers. And so we indulge our favorite pastime, casting stones.
- [2 : 2 9] It happens to me as well. I drive along and I'm furious and irritated at the person who cuts in in front of me. And later on the same journey, I realize that I've just done it to someone else.
- Or I get annoyed when there are typing mistakes in documents. And then sheepishly guilty and hypocritical when I realize that I've caused them.
- We see this casting stones pastime frequently in the media, in the age. We might even call some parts of the age, in fact, the stone age, where stones are cast.
- You don't see it so much in the news and the sport, but you certainly see it in the opinion page. And you certainly see it in the letters to the editor sometimes. People who are criticizing and sitting in judgment from high and lofty moral ground over others.
- You see this game in talkback radio all the time. People with judgmental, opinionated views that they are wanting to propagate in condemnation of others.

- [3 : 25] You see it by the media commentators in our Australian media. You see, self-righteous stone casting is one of our favorite sports, actually. We'd probably do even better at that than, well, we're not doing very well at cricket.
- So maybe we should hone this a bit more. You see, we're happy to see God's wrath vented on those described at the end of Romans chapter 1.
- Do you remember last week, as Megan briefly touched on the last verses? We'd love to see God's wrath come upon them.
- For we read such a list and we think, well, that's other people. And we like to throw stones and cast stones. And we can say amen to verse 32.
- They know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die. Yet they not only do them, but even applaud others who practice them. They deserve to die. We agree. Hear, hear.
- [4 : 39] But that can't be, we say.
- How can we be doing the very same thing as described, for example, in those verses at the end of chapter 1? Verse 2, Paul goes on to say, you say, we know that God's judgment on those who does such things is in accordance with the truth.
- Our mistakes surely are mere peccadilloes by comparison. They're totally excusable. We're provoked by the hot weather and the tiredness and the pressure of deadlines or whatever it is.
- Surely our mere peccadilloes are far outweighed by our good works and our religious piety. We're not like that. We're not like the end of chapter 1. We're not that bad. We're good people.
- This wrath and judgment of God, that's not against us. That's against the bad ones out there, surely. I see that sort of view all the time in funerals, let me say.
- [6 : 02] He was a good chap, the epitome of loving kindness. But why is it that his family's not united in their grief? If anyone will be in heaven, she will.
- What a good person. It was said to me just a couple of days ago about a lady whose funeral I'm taking tomorrow morning. A lady I don't know, I'm sure she was a very pleasant person. Is she the first one to be in heaven?
- Or a person who's dying, who says before they die, I have no regrets. Je ne regrette rien. Famous mistake of one of Margaret Thatcher's politicians was to say that.
- He lost office soon after. See, even Frank Sinatra had a few regrets. You see, we may not be murderers. We may not be practicing homosexuals.
- We may not be practicing covetousness or envy or malice. The list of chapter 1 that's described in last week's passage. But in setting ourselves up to judge others, we play God.
- [7 : 05] Not meaning that we're exercising critical faculties. But rather, we are playing God.
- And what are we doing? We're doing exactly what the end of chapter 1 is talking about. Exchanging the glory of the living true God for self-righteous idolatry.
- We're doing the same thing, you see. We're playing God. We're saying we're in control here. And what chapter 1, verse 22, 23 was talking about, the exchange of the worship of the living God for idolatry.
- When we play God, that is exactly the same mistake that we are making as those described in the last part of chapter 1. Verse 3 of chapter 2, Do you imagine, whoever you are, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgment of God?

You see, God is not looking for self-righteousness. He's looking for repentance. A turning away from sin. A seeking to live for the glory of God.

[8 : 17] And His delay in sending Jesus' return is precisely for that reason, to give us and this world time to repent. Before it's too late.

You see, God wants people everywhere to turn from their sin and live. It's the constant message of the gospel of both the Old and the New Testaments. Repent and believe the good news now, before it's too late.

Now is the time of repentance. And that's what God wants from each one of us. And that is why this universe has yet to end. It is why Jesus has not yet returned. So that you and I and others have opportunity to repent and turn from our sins.

God wants men and women everywhere to repent of self-seeking and to turn to seeking God.

God wants human beings to turn from their wickedness and turn to what is right and good and pure and true, what belongs to God. To obey in faith is the aim of the gospel of God.

[9 : 29] As we saw in chapter 1 verse 5. Repentance is far more than remorse. Far more than regret or sadness that we've stuffed up.

That's not repentance. It's probably not even godly sorrow. Repentance is about turning away and turning back to God.

It's a rethink and a reactivation, reorientation of our whole life and being. So as verse 4 says, Do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience?

Do you not realize that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? That verse is saying the reason why God has yet to send Jesus is because out of his patience and forbearance, he is giving us opportunity to repent.

Not just to express sorrow or regret or remorse, but to turn to God and live. But instead, verse 5, That is by 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.

[10 : 44] That is by despising this opportunity and this time to repent, by being hard-hearted against the gospel of God concerning his son, by being closed to the word of the gospel that calls us to turn to God and away from our sin, then we are actually investing in the wrath of God, storing it up, banking it up, ready for that final day when Jesus returns.

The hard-heartedness of verse 5 is the word sclerosis. It's hard spiritual arteries, we might say, that are unresponsive to God's gospel.

That's the danger. That in this time of opportunity to repent, we'll be too closed, too stubborn, too hard, too cold against the gospel's opportunity.

See, the self-righteous person thinks they're okay. They've stored up more good than bad. That in God's eyes, well, mercy must come to them. I deserve God's mercy. If anyone's going to be in heaven, I will, or she will, or he will.

But it's nonsense. But no one deserves it. No one deserves heaven. No one is righteous. We'll see that in the next couple of weeks, even more clearly than in this passage.

[12 : 03] The self-righteous person thinks they're storing up treasure in heaven, but what actually they're storing up is God's wrath for the final day. It's a false investment. A fatal investment.

Yes, verse 18 of chapter 1 talked about the wrath of God is now revealed from heaven. True. It's revealed from heaven in God, holding back and letting people down the path of their sin, as we saw last week.

But the wrath of God is both present and future. There is more to come, the final wrath to come, and those who are hard-hearted against the call to repentance are storing up even more wrath for the final day.

Oh, it's a bad place to be in now, being the recipient of God's wrath, in his withdrawal of mercy and holding back to let us pursue a path that ultimately leads to death.

That's God's present wrath, and it's a bad place to be in. But it'll be even worse on the final day, when the full investment of the wrath that is due to the self-righteous will be opened from heaven's bank vaults.

[13 : 07] The wrath of God, yes, it's present, but it's full and final expression is something that ought to make each one of us fear and tremble.

The difficult thing is we're not good at owning up to our sin and failure. We don't readily say, I've stuffed up, that's my fault. We sort of hedge our apologies.

We frame them with excuses. I'm sorry, but I was really pressured that day. It's a really hot day. The kids were screaming, and I had pressures at work, and I had deadlines to meet, and in my haste, I didn't really do it.

It's not really that bad, is it? I mean, really, we can cover it up. It won't be a problem. We're not good at simply saying, I've stuffed up. We blame politicians for not owning up to their mistakes, and they're experts in not owning up to their mistakes, but actually, we're not far behind, I think, in that.

Of course, that pattern began way back in Adam and Eve's time. The famous little saying that I've used before is that, what is it? Adam, the man blamed the woman, and the woman blamed the serpent, and the serpent didn't have a leg to stand on.

[14 : 21] So we're good at passing the blame. It's the government's fault. Whose fault is it that we're running out of water? It's not our fault. It must be somebody's fault, so we'll blame the government. We don't like to accept responsibility for our own sins.

What that means is that we actually find it hard to repent and confess our sins before God, because we don't like owning up to them. We sort of think, well, it's not quite my fault.

Somebody else is to blame. There must be blame at least shared for what I've done wrong. We're always looking for excuses, someone else to blame, and that's the mark of the self-righteous person.

Whether they're a pagan or a Jew or a Gentile, it doesn't matter. Self-righteousness is manifest in all sorts of races, and that's the mark of self-righteousness, that we find other people to blame, and such people never repent.

It's why when we get to the last part of Paul's letter to the Romans, in chapter 12, verse 3, and the turning point that moves on from, in effect, the theology to the practice, Paul says in chapter 12, verse 3, for by the grace given to me, I say to everyone among you, not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think.

[15 : 35] You see, how do we think of ourselves rightly and soberly, not proudly and self-righteously? Actually, it's the grace of God that brings us to that position. It's the fruit of the gospel that actually brings us to that position.

And that's where the gospel's leading, through the Paul's letter to the Romans. On that day, the day of wrath, verse 5 says, describing the final day when the Lord Jesus comes again and judges the living and the dead, as we've just sung about and as the famous traditional Christian creeds say, on that day of wrath.

And there are six things about that day that the verses following make clear to us. Firstly, on that day of judgment, judgment is according to our deeds.

Verse 6, God will repay according to each one's deeds. That is not according to their race or religion or background or tradition. Not according to whether you're a Jew or a Gentile, that is a non-Jew.

That's not the distinction. On that day, God's judgment will occur according to deeds done. So that Jews are not exempt, nor even we might say are Christians exempt.

[16 : 52] God will assess our lives. What that means is that what we do actually matters. See, oddly, the liberals of the Christian tradition very quickly get rid of judgment.

They don't like it at all. They're actually following Satan's example from the Garden of Eden because the thing that he denied first was the judgment of God. So be wary if you want to deny the judgment of God as the liberal part of the church does.

It's actually a satanic trap. When we deny the judgment, we're saying my life doesn't actually matter before God. It does matter. The fact that God judges us according to our deeds shows that what we do matters before God.

The second thing is that judgment is personal. See verse 7, how it begins, to those who, literally to the one who, by patiently doing good, seeks for glory and honor and immortality.

He'll give eternal life. While for the one who is self-seeking and who does not obey the truth, but wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. Our translation has made it plural, but actually it's singular.

[18 : 01] To the one person, the individual who does the right thing, then eternal life is the outcome. But to the individual who does not, then God's wrath is the outcome. Fury and wrath at the end of verse 8.

What that means is that judgment is individual and personal. We're not going to escape through by the strength of our parents or grandparents or uncles, aunts or godparents or vicars or ministers or Bible study leaders.

We're there on our own, in effect. And God will treat us individually before that judgment throne. Thirdly, judgment divides us into two groups, as verses 7 and 8 makes clear.

Not three groups or 10 or 12, but two groups. Verse 7, those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality. And the other group, verse 8, those who are self-seeking and who obey not the truth, but wickedness.

Those who pass, eternal life is their outcome. Those who fail, if that's the right word, then God's wrath and fury. Verses 9 and 10 go on in different language to speak of those same two groups.

[19 : 13] There'll be anguish and distress for everyone who does evil, Jew first and also Greek. And then to the group of verse 7, those, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek.

You see, it's not racial division, but it's a division into two groups according to our deeds. Those who pass are described in terms of perseverance and fortitude and patience in their faith, steadfast in doing good and seeking God's glory, seeking God's honor, seeking life forever with God.

To them, God gives eternal life as verse 7 says. It doesn't mean they're perfect people. We misread it if we think they're perfect. Not at all. But those whose aim is the glory of God, those who've been turned around by the grace of the gospel and repented of their sin.

But to those who fail, whose direction in life is self-seeking and self-righteousness, those who've exchanged, as the language of chapter 1 is, the worship of the living God with idolatry and self-seeking, those who don't obey the truth, who've exchanged the truth for a lie, as chapter 1 verse 25 said, hence those who are wicked, as verse 18 of chapter 1 said, to them, God's wrath and fury will come.

Anguish and distress, both now and in the future on that final day. They're the two groups. There's no middle ground. Either those who are seeking the honour and glory of God or those who are seeking their own honour and glory and righteousness.

[20 : 49] Fourthly though, judgment is fair. Verse 11 says, God shows no partiality. All who have sinned apart from the law will also perish apart from the law and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.

that is, all sinners will perish whether they're Jew or Gentile, whether they come under the Old Testament law or like the Gentiles, the Greeks, the non-Jews do not come under the Old Testament law.

That is, it's not a Jew-Gentile division is what Paul is arguing through this section of the letter and indeed a key theme right through the first 11 chapters of Romans. Judgment is fair.

Verse 13, it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous in God's sight but the doers of the law who will be justified. That is, made righteous or declared righteous in God's sight.

Not the hearers, the Jews in general who knew the Old Testament or at least had heard it but those who do the law. Now for Jews this would have been an unnerving thing to say.

[22 : 00] They thought that the reception of the law which had been their tradition for 1500 years nearly was a great privilege and a point of safety and security. We've got the law, the Torah, the Old Testament, we're safe.

We're in God's kingdom. Heaven is guaranteed for us because we've got the law. No, Paul says. The privilege of hearing God's law carries with it the weighty responsibility of doing God's law, being obedient to the law.

And that's what he's arguing here. It's not the hearers but the doers. And the same in the Old Testament. The prophets kept chastising Israel for the same misplaced complacency and confidence.

Israel thought that having the law meant that they were secure and safe. They thought that because they were in the promised land they were secure and safe. They thought because there was a temple they were secure and safe. But the Old Testament prophets made it clear as Paul is doing here that privilege carries responsibility.

There's no room for complacency. Indeed, the more privileged you are in receiving from God his word more accountability is placed upon you for obeying that word.

[23 : 21] Amos in speaking to rebellious Israel had some very striking words when he said quoting God to Israel you only have I know privilege therefore I will punish you.

They've abrogated their responsibility. Privilege is not all that matters. It's responding to the privilege with obedient faith.

But on the other hand this argument does not excuse the so-called ignorance of the law. Those who don't know God's law from the Old Testament. You see God will not only punish the self-righteous who have the law he will also judge those who do not have the law.

Is ignorance an excuse? No. Remember the words last week in chapter 1. No one is without excuse. You see the evidence for God is plain.

Verse 19 of chapter 1 for what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature invisible though they are have been understood and seen through the things he's made so they are without excuse.

[24 : 37] Here Paul writes it in these words in verse 14 when Gentiles who do not possess the law do instinctively what the law requires these though not having the law are a law to themselves they show that what the law requires is written on their hearts to which their own conscience also bears witness.

Now Paul is not arguing here that Gentiles don't sin but he is arguing that occasionally they do what is right and that in doing occasionally what is right they are showing a basic knowledge of morality that is they are without excuse before the judgment throne of God whether they've had the law of God or not they may have suppressed the truth about God that's the argument in chapter one about those who are seeking their own glory but even then he says in these verses I just read in verses 14 and 15 their conscience may still show or bear witness to some basic morality now Paul is not arguing the point of Pinocchio here where Jeremy Cricket says let your conscience be your guide our consciences may guide us but not infallibly sometimes our consciences are oversensitive sometimes they're too insensitive but but certainly the fact that we have conscience shows that even for those who are in a sense outside

God's law the Gentiles who are not recipients of the Old Testament law there is still something about God the creator and his standards of judgment that lies within our heart no matter how distorted or insensitive or oversensitive that conscience may actually be certainly our conscience is often conditioned by our environment and schooling and upbringing and so on it may be distorted but the fact that it's there Paul is arguing shows that there is no excuse for ignorance of the law even people who do not know God have moral capacity at times they will do what is right and know that it's right at times they'll do what is wrong and know that it is wrong it's one of the great apologetics that is sometimes used against Christianity on the issues of conscience and morality and so on and yet on the other hand we ought to be using it back those who say there is no

God well how do they explain this feeling of morality of right and wrong if we have just evolved without any maker and standards and judgment well that's another argument to pursue for which there's no time now Paul's point here is whether Jew or Gentile they are without excuse and will face the judgment throne of God they'll be judged according to what they know and therefore judgment will stand for all and they too whether they've known the law or not will ultimately be lacking before God's judgment throne the end of verse 15 their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them on the day when according to my gospel God through Jesus Christ will judge the secret thoughts of all verse 15 is in fact implying that their consciences will betray them on that day so what Paul is arguing here is the fourth point that God's judgment is fair to those to whom much is given

Jews who've received the law much was expected to those to whom little is given they're not exempt a good illustration of this I think comes in the opening chapters of the prophet Amos there are eight oracles against eight different nations accusations of and promises of God's judgment for the sins they've committed for six of those nations listed first they are pagan nations who have not received the old testament law and the crimes that are listed in those six nations are basic crimes against humanity their degradation and depravity and humiliation of enemies and conquered peoples when it gets to numbers seven and eight Judah and Israel the people who've received God's law the same judgment will come upon them but the standards are higher they are judged according to God's law that they've received and they also are found lacking the standard of the first six pagan nations is low but their practice is lower but to those to whom much is given the Jews

[29 : 11] Judah and Israel the standard is higher and their practice remains lower God's judgment is fair whether to Jew or Gentile there is no excuse so so far we've seen that judgment is according to deeds judgment is personal to the individual judgment divides into two groups and judgment is fair fifthly judgment God's judgment is true and right the end of verse 16 says God will judge the secret thoughts of all he doesn't judge by appearances Patricia Routledge will be caught out on judgment day let me say and for those who don't know what I'm talking about the British comedy keeping up appearances is all about putting on a screen so that people think she's actually very posh she's not she's a commoner God knows the secret things you can't put on an appearance before God and get away with it he judges according to our hearts he knows our hearts if they're stubborn hard and cold and he will judge them he knows our thoughts he knows our desires he knows our weaknesses and our strengths and he judges them you see we can fool each other look around and we all look to be fairly respectable noble upright people pillars of the church and establishment and all that sort of stuff we can fool each other pretty easily but we can't fool God he knows the insides he knows our hearts he knows our thoughts he knows our desires our greed our covetousness our envy he knows our dissatisfactions he knows our grumpiness he knows our hypocrisy he knows what lies in our hearts even if our words don't expose what's in our hearts

God's judgment is true and right there won't be any conning of a jury on that judgment day there won't be any sham justice on that day won't be politically motivated in any way prestige in society won't be able to buy the best lawyers to get you off on that day God's judgment is true and right it's penetrating to our very deepest recesses of our whole being there'll be no miscarriage of justice with him and so often in the papers we see people getting up in arms because of an apparent miscarriage of justice not least with David Hicks not on that day whether David Hicks gets off or not God will judge him along with us according to the secret thoughts of our hearts our excuses won't get us far you see God sees through all that sham and veneer of self righteousness the handballing over to somebody else blame my parents blame my school blame my teachers blame the government blame the bishop blame the church blame somebody but not me it doesn't work before

God he knows what's there he's not misled or deceived by such arguments by such blame passing self righteousness actually just crumples before him on the day of God's wrath and judgment and finally God's judgment is inescapable there is no exemption exemption for the self righteousness it's a bit like walking up to a customs thing when you arrive in a country you see the sign that says EU nationals over here the non EU nationals over here you have to join one or other queue there's no self righteous queue that means you get a fast track through like EU nationals can have when they arrive in Britain or France if you belong to another EU country I always feel jealous of them to walk through and here I've got to show my passport and take all that time there's no fast track for self righteousness when you arrive at the customs entry hall of heaven it's one queue it's inescapable there's no other way through but through

God's judgment there's no exemption you see for Jews there's no sign that says if you're a Jew and you've got the law we'll come through here no not at all there's no excuse for Gentiles and ignorance are you ignorant of the laws of this place come through here fast track no not at all see whether you're Jewish or Gentile or self righteous there's no fast track there's one track God's judgment is inescapable all will face God's righteous judgment on that day you and I included all will be found lacking our deeds no matter how good they are how many we can stack up for whatever platitudes people might say at our funerals we'll be lacking on that final day all of us Jew or Gentile need the mercy of God it's the only thing that will help us through the customs entry hall of heaven on that final day it's the only thing that will mean that we can escape the wrath of God on that final day we can't plead ourself we can't blame somebody else it is only the mercy of

God that's Paul's argument here he's coming to the mercy of God as he's making it clear our absolute fundamental basic and eternal need for God's completely undeserved unmerited unearned mercy we have no claim on not at all not a skerrick all our religious piety counts for nothing we've got no hold on the mercy of God we've got God's not in debt to us to give us the mercy of God in Christ that's why Paul wrote this letter to the Romans to Christians and to non-Christians probably it's why we have the gospel concerning Jesus Christ it's why we have the gospel that is to lead us to obedient faith for the glory of God because we need the mercy of Christ it's only found in the gospel obedient faith only comes as a fruit of the mercy of

[35 : 29] God in Christ in the gospel and that's why Paul's not ashamed of the gospel it's why Paul knows that the gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith Jew or Gentile Amen the behavior you