

"The Kindness of God's Judgement" Romans 2:1-16

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[0:00] If you want to follow along, we'll be in chapter 2 of Romans. When we have no movie to watch or we're in between series, we find ourselves going back to a quick episode of Seinfeld.

And we watched one this past week where George, if you know anything about the characters, George, he is ridiculous and neurotic.

He's my favourite character for sure. But he is trying to get out of a charity event that is in honour of his recently deceased fiancé by lying to her parents that he just purchased a place in the Hamptons.

And he had to go there over the time of the event and sign the papers. And they hummed and hawed, okay, no problem, and he got out of it. And then it turns out that his would-be in-laws see him at a hot dog stand, of all places, and they know he was lying.

And then George finds out that they lied to him, and he's incensed that they would lie to him, even though he lied to them.

[1:16] It's ridiculous. It's outrageous. It's top-notch George. But as absurd as it is, I think this is the beauty of good writing, it illustrates how shocking hypocrisy can be.

It shows that we have this propensity to pass judgement on people, even though we do the very same thing as them, maybe even worse things. It's a very serious problem.

It's one that is very pervasive, and it exposes the fact that, no matter how moralistic or upright we think we are, we really truly have no moralistic laurels to stand upon.

So if you remember a couple weeks ago, Romans chapter 1, the Apostle Paul makes clear that mankind is idolatrous and antagonistic against God and his just rule.

And that God's judgment, at least in this life, his just judgment is to hand them over to what they truly want.

[2:25] And what does it result in? A debased desires, passions, and a mind. This is from chapter 1, 18 to the end of the chapter.

So in chapter 2, he will show us that this idolatry and rejection of God goes far deeper than just bad behaviour.

And how the moralistic and religious person does not have a leg to stand on, for the judgment of God upon these people is alive and well. So we're going to take some time to go through the first half of chapter 2, verses 1 to 16.

And we're going to learn some things about the justice and judgment of God. We're going to learn first that it is inescapable. We're going to learn also that it's impartial, and that it is incredibly just.

And I'll just say this. Judgment is a very difficult thing. Nobody wants to be judged. And we look at other people as being, if they are judge, as like a cardinal sin.

[3:31] But the judgment of God that we're going to encounter in the text this morning is an expression of his kindness. And in fact, in many respects, we do not get salvation without God's judgment.

So it is a very good thing, and it is critical for us to understand. So if you have a scripture journal, turn with me, verse 1 of chapter 2, and we'll look at how the judgment of God is inescapable.

Let's read 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.

We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. So in light of all that Paul said in the previous chapter, it would be easy for the moral and upright person to feel pretty good about themselves.

They have desires that are in check. Their passions are controlled. Their minds are sober, or so they think. They would say, God would say to them, the Apostle Paul is saying to them, you, every one of you, is actually a judgmental hypocrite.

[4:52] For your righteousness is really a self-righteousness, which means it is a mile wide and an inch deep, and worst of all, it cannot save you.

Why is this self-righteousness not a fail-safe? Why is it not a means of salvation? Because as we are critical of others for their poor behavior, whatever that poor behavior is, we often give ourselves a pass.

We have double standards. For others, those standards are impossibly high, and for ourselves, they are comfortably low. We have this incredible ability to rationalize our behavior as not being so bad.

In the example I gave from Seinfeld, George is a master, first-degree liar and deceiver. And he, it's a part of who he is.

It's no problem. Yet his would-be in-laws, all they do is don't let in, or let on that he's lying, and he's incensed. And it's funny in a situation, a sitcom like Seinfeld, but we find ourselves, if you're honest, doing the same thing.

[6:06] The standards for others are up here, but you get a pass. In preparation for this sermon, I thought about a very judgmental person who would do well to read and meditate upon this section of Scripture.

Surely, if they read it, they would find themselves condemned, especially reading verses 1 to 4. In fact, this person needed this so desperately because their judgmentalism was hurting others, and it had to stop.

I promise you, this was my thought process going through this on a certain day this week when I was in the text studying. And I found that, and maybe this is God and his kindness, that I was being just as judgmental, if not more, than the person that I was having this thought experiment about. That I was passing judgment on them as if I were God himself. Their judgment, bad. Mine, totally justified. I know what's right.

I'm a minister. I'm reading the Bible. They need to get in here. This Scripture needs to be like a wake-up call, like a bucket of cold water in their face to wake them up.

[7:14] And yet, here I was condemning them as if I were God himself. I found, wow, this Scripture is unbelievably true. The standards for them, way higher.

For me, way down here. And I'll just say this. This isn't a text that means that we can't pass a type of judgment that seeks to call people to holiness in a humble way.

But rather, this is a pseudo-divine judgment. A judgment that, again, says that, you know, God might have to share his judgment seat with us because of our incredible ability to see right from wrong.

Therefore, if people stand condemned by our standard, God is saying in our text that he will judge us according to our standard.

In fact, he will judge us according to his standard. So if they stand condemned, surely we do as well. So why do we do this? I think the big reason why we do this is because we have this desire to maintain our self-righteousness and not deal with our sin.

[8:37] We like to excuse ourselves. We don't want to deal with the difficult behavior that we have because there's a level of indignity to it, and embarrassment to it, that we aren't willing to spare other people from.

We think we can have our cake and eat it too. And can we get away with it? It would seem so. God is giving those shameful, sinful people over, remember verse one, over to their debased desires and passions and their debased minds.

Yet here we are upright. So surely if God isn't judging us like those shameful people, then maybe he's giving us a pass. God does not judge me, for there is nothing to judge.

But look with me at verse three and four, for Paul completely destroys that line of thinking. Do you suppose, O man, you who judge those who practice 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?

[9:52] It turns out that the self-righteous amongst us, the people beside you, maybe you yourself, such acts are just as much a rejection of God as the rejection of God described in chapter one.

So we stand condemned. We think we will escape God's judgment because we think that not feeling the consequence of our judgmental and self-righteous hypocrisy is God potentially giving us license to sin.

But really, Paul says, it's God allowing us time to repent, to understand the errors of our ways before his perfect judgment falls on us. Why?

Because he is kind. Because he is loving. God's judgment is often delayed, but it is never negated. It is inescapable. For the one who is deserving of judgment, God will not ultimately let it pass. As we saw a couple weeks ago in chapter one, God's judgment actually is what makes God's righteousness righteous.

[11:07] For evil is rightly and justly dealt with wherever it is to be found. And yet we see the refrain throughout the Bible that God is long-suffering. He is patient.

And this is part of his very character so that we would have, again, this opportunity to turn from our self-worship towards worship of him.

But here we are. Some of us have been Christians for as long as we can remember. Some of us have become Christians only maybe in the last, say, five years or maybe less.

Some of us, even though we would say we're Christians, maybe we're outside of the Christian faith. Wherever it may be, where you find yourself at this morning, what we all try to do is find refuge in God's character, presuming that he treats our sin the way we treat it, with comfortably low standards.

But again, this is taking refuge in a false vision of who God is. What it does is it emphasizes the mercy at the expense of holiness. The gospel reading that I read from Matthew chapter 4.

[12:16] What does Satan tempt Jesus with? With scripture, but always elevating one scripture at the expense or in contradiction of the other.

So we can't talk about God's mercy, God's mercy, God's mercy, God's mercy, God's mercy, and somehow forget to talk about God's holiness. God is not a collection of his attributes where God is loving, God is merciful, God is holy, but maybe we can emphasize one or the other.

Rather, classical theology will say that God is his attributes. And what does that mean? It means that we cannot pick and choose the attributes of God that we're cool with or that we're not cool with. If we do this, what we are doing is entering into a form of idolatry where we are fashioning God into an image that we are okay with or that we like. We are sanding off the rough edges of who God is or what he is demanding of us or the consequences of our sin.

You see, it is not just those in chapter 1 who are the idolatrous ones, but us as well. The upright people, the moralistic people.

[13:41] This is not a faith issuing from a transformed heart, but the exchange of the truth of God for a lie so that our hearts can remain hard and cold towards him so that we can get on with our lives and suppress the guilt that we may feel until we don't feel it.

Verse 5. You see, God's patience does not mean we get off scot-free, scot-free.

Rather, it just means that we are going to face an even greater judgment when the day comes. You see, hard hearts that think we are the exception to the rule are not hard hearts that will endure God's just judgment.

And unfortunately for us, this is a perennial problem for every woman and man. We are fooled if we think God will show us partiality. It's heavy, but it needs to be said that God will not show us partiality and that his judgment is inescapable.

How then can we gain a soft heart so that we can avoid the day of wrath? To avoid God's just judgment against us. Look with me at verses 6 and 7.

[15:08] This enters into our second point that God's judgment is impartial. Verses 6 and 7. 6, 7, and 8. God 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. But for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.

Is this a recipe for a soft heart? To do good works so that we would be righteous in God's sight? I mean, even with God's help, is this not a kind of righteousness brought about by self-improvement? And if the entire verses 1 to 5, that first half, had to do with those that think that they could self-righteously become righteous in God's sight, and as such, they're described with having a hard heart, then why does the solution here in verses 6 to 8 seem to be that we need to work harder to do good so that God would somehow give us eternal life?

What's happening here? Is Paul contradicting himself? These are important questions to consider. I think it's helpful for us to understand that Paul is a Bible scholar.

[16:36] He knows the Bible inside and out, and what he is doing here is quoting a line found throughout Scripture that God will render to each according to his works, but specifically, he is looking at Psalm 62 verse 12.

So a good question to ask, therefore, is what is Psalm 62 all about? Psalm 62, just really quickly, verse 12 is where we get this quotation, and Psalm 62 verse 12 says this, right at the end, for you will render to a man according to his works.

You will render to a man according to his works. Very similar language as we see in verse 6. And yet, Psalm 62, written by King David, opens up verses 1 and 2 with this, for God alone my soul waits in silence, from him comes my salvation, he alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress, I shall not be greatly shaken.

Verses 5 and 8 of Psalm 62 says, for God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress, I shall not be shaken.

On God rests my salvation and my glory, my rock, my refuge, is God. Trust in him at all times, O people. Pour out your heart before him.

[18:03] God is a refuge for us. Therefore, it would seem, taken, if we take that whole Psalm, all 12 verses, and we consider what these works are in verse 12 of Psalm 62 that Paul is quoting here in Romans chapter 2 verse 6, I think we can be sure that Paul doesn't have in mind a righteousness that is brought about by our works, but rather a type of works that are in a right response to the salvation of God.

That God saves us, he is our fortress, he is our refuge, we find our salvation in him and in him alone and what do we do as a result? As an expression of that love and thankfulness that flows from salvation, we do good works, we follow him, we obey him.

The Apostle James says something very similar in chapter 2, verse 26 of his epistle, James 2, 26, For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

If you were here on Ash Wednesday for the exhortation at the beginning of the service, there was a line that I read, the faith that saves is the same faith that seeks to obey.

So again, going back to verses 6 and 7, it would seem that Paul is referring to this very thing. He is referring to those who are seeking glory, honor, and immortality, doing good works in response to the salvation that God has already given because this is the way God gives salvation throughout both Testaments.

[19:45] God didn't just flip a switch in the New Testament or turn off the road and take a different kind of path for us so that we could find salvation through our works.

It's always been relying on God to do the work that only He can do and we embrace it by faith and then we respond to Him in good works. So you see, a soft heart is one that humbles itself, one that seeks the righteousness of Christ, recognizing that our righteousness is an affront to what He is offering us.

It can only come through the gospel of Christ. A hard heart as we have seen in the previous section and in chapter 1, it cannot escape the just wrath of God because it looks to God and says, to hell

with you, I will be my own God.

It's a rejection of God. Therefore, God does not judge us, our righteousness based on anything that we do, nor on who we are, which is a remarkable thing.

I mean, here, since the enlightenment, I mean, human agency has been elevated as the chief aspect of who we are, but for the majority of human history, it actually mattered what family you came from.

[21:06] And I mean, it's still that way in many parts of the world and even here in Canada as well, but imagine this God is saying, it actually doesn't matter which family you come from, what pedigree you are from.

If you have noble blood coursing through your veins, nor does it matter the job that you have, the ability to memorize chapter and verse from scripture or whether you attend with perfect attendance even on Sundays where there's a gold medal game on the Olympics, kudos to you all.

God will not judge you more righteous than those that may or may not be staying home because they have a sniffle. No judgment. I'm just joking around. But you get my point that God, what he does is that he judges us instead based on our response to his good news.

His salvation. You might be nodding your head, but just consider how scandalous a thing this is. For those that are here and I, friends, do not somehow think that you are exempt from self-righteousness because you are not.

It means that you have no religious or moral leg to stand on. It means that if you are truly righteous in God's sight, it is not because of what you have done, but how you have responded to what God has done.

[22:36] In fact, verse 8 says that such an attitude that pushes back against this is the hallmark of one who obeys unrighteousness.

Verses 9 and 10 really cements this down that God is one who judges with imperfect impartiality.

Verses 9 and 10 says this, There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honour and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also to the Greek.

For God shows no partiality. This is wonderful news for us because we cannot fall out of favour with God if we are in favour with him, if we respond rightly to his free, wonderful, incredible, scandalous gift of salvation.

But what about those who do not yet know Christ? Sure, God shows no favouritism judging all based on how they respond to the gospel, to his salvation.

But does that not make God unjust in his judgment because he judges those who do not know Christ and yet they have not heard him? Now, the next section is going to get into this and what it doesn't get into is what do we do or how does God treat people in a scenario where there is an unreached people group and how he's going to hold them to account at the end of the age.

[24:08] I think that is putting too much weight on this specific verse. Nevertheless, we're going to see in this next and final section that God's judgment, although it is inescapable and impartial, it is certainly not unjust, but it is just.

Read with me verses 12 to 16. 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.

I think a bit more context will help us understand this very briefly. God's chosen people, the Jewish nation, receives the law at Mount Sinai after they are rescued from Egypt, but before they enter the promised land.

[25:26] possessing the law, they do not make, did not make them God's people, but as God's people they were to follow his law to live holy lives that honoured God. Again, we see a response to God's salvation by honouring him and following him.

A faith without works is a dead kind of faith. So the law or the Torah was God's revelation to his people about how they ought to live and how they must look to God for salvation.

But the history of the Jewish people is no different in many respects from the history of all the other peoples in that they were idolatrous. They honoured themselves rather than honouring God, but the difference is that they knew how they should have acted.

For God had made it clear when he gave them the law. It was clear in the law what was good and evil, and that sin would be justly judged.

But again, what about those who do not have the law, who have not heard about the God of the Bible? What about those who worshipped Jupiter or Hermes in the first century? How about the ancient worshippers of Hinduism in the far east of the ancient Near East, or those that subscribe to the faith of Jainism?

[26:44] How about the various peoples in the Americas who will not hear about the God of the Bible for another 1500 years, and when they hear about the God of the Bible, it is a distorted kind of God that they're presented?

What about your irreligious aunt who has never heard the gospel? Or your Muslim co-worker who delights in taking his son to hockey practice, but again, has never heard about Jesus?

What about them? How can God justly judge them at the end of the age? They do not have the law, so therefore, you'd think that they cannot be judged by God for their actions because they did not know right from wrong.

But Paul, he sticks a pin in that balloon. He says, no, for all sin, whether under the law or apart from the law, know it. No one can perfectly keep the law.

Remember, we're in section from verses 1-18 to the end of chapter 3 verse 20 that really sells the problem of why we need the gospel, the gospel being in chapter 1 verses 16 and 17.

[27:57] So we're in an extended section that sells the problem why we need the gospel. And right at the very end, chapter 3 verse 20, Paul makes this alarming statement.

If you have your scripture journal, it will be on page 18. And this is what he says, chapter 3 verse 20. For by works of the law, no human being will be justified in God's sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

And Paul here, he is saying that even if you could keep the law, as people that receive the law, as Jewish people, because you're a lawbreaker, you are condemned, but also for those that do not have the law, God has created all people to be moral creatures.

To know that there is an eternity. How they describe it, how they communicate it, that's besides the point, but they know that there is something of a moral universe, and some kind of creator that has created all things.

Human beings are both moral and God conscious. Therefore, right and wrong are universally known. God is saying in verses 13 and 14, hypothetically, that even if the lawkeepers could keep the law, okay, even if the people that didn't have the law could somehow keep the requirements of the law, they would be justified, but they can't.

[29:28] All human beings in all places at all times know that there is right and wrong, they know that there's some kind of eternity, or at least they're longing for an eternity, and yet all of them are law breakers.

All of them. Jew or Greek, all of them are law breakers, all of them know right and wrong, good from evil, and all of them have this propensity to look towards evil and not for good.

Therefore, when God judges, he will judge all by the standards that were given, that they were given, and by the secrets of their hearts. So in short, God's judgment will take into account all the considerations, even those of the interior life.

He knows the hearts and the minds and the thoughts and the motives of all, which is a very frightening thing, and he will judge accordingly. So how can this God, who knows even our own thoughts, how could he possibly, in his goodness, be unjust in his judgment?

This is telling us that there will be no miscarriage of judgment at the day of judgment. All facts will be considered, all secrets known. In fact, the call of your purity that we say before every service reminds us of this, that God knows all of our thoughts, all of our motives, and then we ask God to cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit.

[31:05] our motives will be exposed and this judgment will come through Christ himself. To have our very motives displayed as if they would be on a screen at the end of the age, it's a terrifying thought.

We are expert hiders of sin. Who could stand? The religious with their law? The irreligious with their built-in morality?

Who could stand before this God? So then ultimately, if God is a God who judges with an inescapable judgment, who is impartial in his judgment, who is just in his judgment, is there hope to escape this judgment?

Here's the hope. The hope is that our judge is also our savior. savior. The one who knows our interior life, our motives, our secrets, the things that you have thought about, the things that maybe that you have fantasized about, the things that you would be utterly embarrassed if anybody knew. He to take upon himself all that would be judged justly against you that was laid on him so that we could have a standing before God himself.

[32:38] So you see, here's the thing, like I said at the beginning, that God's judgment, without it, salvation would have no meaning. What would we be saved from?

So in the end, Christ, he takes upon himself the penalty for our sins so that we are judged not by the way we ought to be judged justly by God, impartially by God, inescapably by God, but rather we are judged to be clean, to be innocent, to be guilt free, for Christ has stood in our place.

You see, I think the great tragedy of human life is that we do not want to admit the indignity of being both self-righteous and sinful so we self-justify.

We bend the rules and standards so that we can enjoy a level of self-defined dignity, but the real indignity of it all is renouncing the righteousness of God, denying his good and just judgment for something we call righteousness but is utter folly.

I was trying to think of an example of it. Lewis has this example where he talks of here we are making mud pies when there is an incredible vacation for us at the beach waiting.

[34:05] I mean I look at it like there's this incredible table that is set for us the choices foods the best drink and the best host that will be dining with us Christ himself and we are more content to broom up the crud that has fallen from the meal before and try to pick out the crumbs and somehow claiming that this would be a better meal than the one that is lavishly made in front of us.

Friends this is what it is like when we say that our righteousness our dignity is greater than God's that he offers to us through Christ our Lord.

Friends the perfectly just righteous and impartial judge he is also your savior remember this so let's be done with trying to save ourselves trying to self justify judging other people so that we somehow will diminish our sin and stand in judgment over them and again further bolster our own self righteousness but rather embrace the kindness and love of God that is leading us to repentance friends let us do away with this false and fake and utterly ridiculous indignity of self righteousness and let us look to Christ sin Thank you.