



What happens when a person truly experiences the all-powerful transformative work of the Gospel? This is the question behind the Apostle Paul's thoughts in Romans 1–3.

At the end of Romans 1 we see that if a person rejects the Gospel, God will "give them over" to their wicked desires and they spiral further downward into their brokenness and sin. As we saw last Sunday, this is a tragic situation. The unbeliever is missing all of the blessings that come with salvation and "God's wrath is being revealed."

Now in chapter 2 Paul shifts our attention to people who look like pretty good people. They're moral, rule-following people who were part of the church in Rome. The problem was they thought they were "really special" and morally superior to everyone else.

In the church I grew up attending, if you abstained from drinking alcohol, you were absolutely considered morally superior to the alcohol drinker; "Perhaps we should pray for them." And if a person watched an R-rated movie, maybe they should make an appointment to talk with the pastor. I became this person and in some way, this is a pitfall many moral religious people fall into. Charles Spurgeon said, "The greatest enemy to human souls is the self-righteous spirit which makes men look to themselves for salvation."

As Paul shifts his attention from the blatantly sinful to the self-righteously sinful, it gives us opportunity to examine our own lives today. Are we following their pattern of building our identity around our moralism? Do we pass judgment on the weaknesses and addictions and sin we see in others? And if so, what should we do about it?

Turn with me to Romans 2:1–4 and we'll begin our investigation of why the self-righteous person shouldn't judge others.

**You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?**

## **The Self-Righteous Shouldn't Pass Judgment on Others**

Verse 1 starts us on a theme that is carried through all of our verses for today. Someone is passing judgment on someone else. The instruction to **not** judge others could be a bit confusing because in 1 Corinthians 2 Paul tells us to judge all things. And at the end of Romans 1, the wicked person approves of the wicked behaviors of everyone. So in essence, he doesn't judge the immoral behavior.

Let me clarify. The meaning of "pass judgment" in verse 1 that's being condemned is not an acknowledgment of simply saying "that's wrong." God expects his followers to make that kind of assessment and stand up for what's right. But that's not the behavior that's being described in verse 1. These people were "passing judgment" on others. If we look back at the examples of sin that were given at the end of chapter 1, this "passing judgment" would have sounded like this:

"You hate God. I love God with all of my heart."

"You're boastful. That's such an ugly quality. Hmmm, I'm so glad I don't talk about my good qualities."

"With all of your sinfulness, you should feel terrible about yourself. I sure am glad I feel really good about myself."

In their words and attitude, the judges see a sharp contrast between their behavior and the behavior of the wicked person. But if we look deeper, we're told two times in these verses that the religious person "does the same thing" (verses 1 & 3) as the outwardly wicked person. How can this be?

The religiously moral person isn't looking deeply enough. If they would look deeper, they'd see that they are infusing a moral superiority and a self-righteous attitude into their thinking. Pastor and author John Stott points out that we are far quicker and harsher in our criticism of others than ourselves. We have all kinds of excuses for ourselves: We were misunderstood, hungry, angry, lonely or tired. We can more easily extend forgiveness to ourselves but not consider the burden of someone else.

Stott put it like this: "We work ourselves up into a state of self-righteous indignation over the disgraceful behavior of other people, while the very same behavior seems nor nearly so serious when it is ours, rather than theirs." When we pass judgment on someone else, the Apostle Paul says we are condemning ourselves.

Our phones are constantly being upgraded to integrate more and more into our lives. Just this past week my phone spontaneously started telling me how long my drive would be to get home! I didn't knowingly communicate to my phone that's where I was going. It seems to be guessing my destination! I don't think it's difficult for us to imagine the scenario where our phones recorded everything we ever said. That would be scary, wouldn't it? And what if our phones also discerned and recorded our attitudes? Then what would it be like if at the end of time our phones were brought to God and all of it was revealed for God to judge us according to these facts?

In verse 3 Paul is saying this is going to happen. "Do you think you will escape the judgment of God? Quit deceiving yourself about how good you think you are."

Let me share with you a tip that's helped me so much not to pass judgment on others: Don't say "you," say "I." Let me give you an example. When I was first married my instinct was to think and say something like, "Cassie, you left the kitchen a mess this morning" or "Cassie, you didn't pay the rent on time." When I did that she felt attacked and judged because I was attacking and passing judgment on her.

When I flipped my thinking and words to say "I" instead, it would sound something like: "Cassie, when you don't clean up the dishes in the morning, I feel like I have to do it right when I get home. And at that time, I'm really drained and don't want to. Would it be possible for both of us to clean up our breakfast dishes before we leave the house in the morning?"

When I shared like this she didn't feel attacked or judged. Instead, it set up a safe conversation where we could talk through our differences because she knew I wasn't passing judgment on her with a morally superior attitude. I was a flawed, struggling person coming to her for conversation.

After showing the self-righteous person that they shouldn't be passing judgment on others, Paul asks them a question in verse 4 with the hope of pricking their consciences: "*Don't you realize that it was God's grace that led you to repentance, not your good morality?*"

This question is Paul's indirect and thought-provoking way to say to them, "Hey, you self-righteous people, you need salvation too. And since no one has any good merit to bring to God, don't you remember that you came to Jesus with nothing? Don't you remember that Jesus' grace, given freely to you, led you to salvation?"

The intent of this question is to reveal a heart of self-righteousness. The self-righteous person will acknowledge God but refuses to worship him. They will agree with God's holy standards yet see themselves as somehow exempt from the standard. This leads them to a very dangerous place of passing judgment on everyone else.

Think about it this way. When God shows his kindness, forbearance and patience to people he's revealing part of himself to humanity.

- How did Moses react when he experienced God's presence? He hid his face and said, "Who am I to go to Pharaoh?"
- When Isaiah experienced God's presence how did he react? He said, "Woe to me, for I am ruined."
- When Paul, the author of this letter experienced God's presence, he fell to the ground.

Think about yourself. What's happened to you when you truly experience God's presence?

I told you earlier that I was raised in a highly moralistic church. As a result, I passed judgment on others all the time. What's happened to me when I've truly experienced God's presence? At the age of 25 I attended a Christian conference with worship and teaching that was like I was in God's presence. As I was singing to the Lord on the last night, there was a powerful culmination of the teaching and the song lyrics. And in God's presence he told me, "Shawn, yes, you're on staff at a church, but you don't love people. You use them." I knew this was the voice of the holy God of the universe. He was right and I was overwhelmed with sorrow. I confessed. I cried. And I asked God to change me.

I'm no Moses, Isaiah or the Apostle Paul, but do you see how we had similar experiences when we truly experienced God's presence? When a person experiences God's presence, there is no place for pride or passing judgment. A person is aware of God's holiness and his or her sinfulness. Through these verses, it's like you hear Paul pleading with the self-righteous person to either have an encounter with God or remember when it happened to them. Because when that happens, you aren't cocky anymore and you aren't passing judgment on others anymore.

As we read these next verses, notice that the moralist will be surprised by the judgment they receive from God.

### **The Self-Righteous Need Salvation Too**

**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.**

**God "will repay each person according to what they have 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 (verses 5–11).**

Paul is using banking terms here as he illustrates how these religious people are storing up wrath against themselves like someone stores up money in a bank savings account. That doesn't sound like a good idea!

There is a lot of deep theology packed into these verses, and there's the potential for confusion here. But it really isn't confusing at all. Basically, Paul is showing us in these verses that the gospel is needed for the self-righteous moralist just as much as the unreligious person. Tim Keller said, "Any moral person who is satisfied with their spiritual state is denying the doctrine of righteousness through faith alone. They think they don't need to be given righteousness, because they have their own. They don't need the gospel, so they don't get the gospel! They'll stand up proudly on the last day until God presses the play button on their phone."

Along this theme, let's look at verse 6. Verse 6 says that **"God will repay each person according to what they have done."** That sounds like earning God's favor. We've got to explore this.

Verses 6-8 have caused some unnecessary confusion because people wonder if Paul is saying that a person must add works to their faith in order to make it through God's judgment. First off, keep in mind that whenever you sense something contradicting itself in the Bible, remember that God can't contradict himself and maintain his perfection. Investigate deeper to discern the meaning. As we do that in verse 6 we learn that Paul is quoting Psalm 62. God **"will repay each person according to what they have done."** So what had the people done in Psalm 62? The answer gives great illumination to Paul's meaning.

In Psalm 62 King David is contrasting two groups of people: Group 1 is a wicked group that is plotting against God's king. They are liars and they are God's enemy. The people in Group 2 look to God for salvation and find their rest in God alone.

So when Romans 2:6 and Psalm 62 say that the person will be "repaid" for what they've "done," Group 1 is judged as "guilty" because they have no faith in God and Group 2 is judged righteous because they have faith in God. Faith in God to provide salvation has always been and will always be the only way God gives the reward of salvation. That's what verse 6 is saying; God will repay each person according to whether they have placed their faith in God or not.

### **The Truly Righteous Will be Revealed by God's Judgment**

**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. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.) This will take place on the day when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares (verses 12–16).**

In verses 12-16 Paul pits everyone into a relationship with the law. Eleven times this word is used in four verses. What is he talking about? In his Romans commentary RC Sproul explains it this way: "Paul is saying that those who have the law perish with the law, and those who do not have the law perish without the law." Everyone is "perishing" when they attempt to earn God's favor with or without the law.

Some will object by saying that it doesn't seem fair that God would hold gentiles accountable to a standard they didn't know about. Is that fair and just? That's a good question that deserves a thoughtful answer.

Most theologians and philosophers rely upon the *ius gentium* (the law of nations) to explain this. This is the idea that God has written his law on people's hearts and their behavior reveals that they know the difference between right and wrong. We suppress the truth (1:18) but like that giant spring, we push it in but the spring is always there and we know it.

This is why people know right from wrong: A person knows it's wrong to lie to their spouse; a person knows it's wrong to cheat the system; hang around a playground with kids and you'll see the principle of justice at work. Kids want everyone to follow the rules. And if someone breaks the rules, they want them to be punished. They want justice. It's not until they get older and their consciences are seared that they lose some of this.

Everyone has a God-designed inner conscience that reveals his moral "law" to each person. They don't know everything, but they know something. Those who have God's law have a better opportunity. But opportunity doesn't ensure success. When Paul uses the "law" so many times he's communicating that rule-abiding people will never get the favor they're hoping for from God any more than the person who doesn't possess the law. The favor and peace of God is only given to those who place their faith in Jesus. The law is powerless to give that.

But don't think that following the law is pointless. Verses 13 and 16 are telling us that God will be accurately and perfectly judging people, first according to their faith in Jesus, and second according to their actions, even the hidden actions and invisible attitudes of our hearts. If a person places their faith in Jesus, their actions will reveal this faith.

As a man who was dedicated to following the law before his conversion, can you hear Paul's burden for his countrymen to break out of their spiritual slumber? Paul doesn't want them to

be caught off guard when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ at the end of time. He knows that's waiting for all of us. Oh, but don't be caught unaware. There's no favoritism with God. There's no sneaking by with God. There are no mistakes with God. He is the perfect and justified judge.

In Romans 1 the Apostle Paul has shown us that the power of God brings salvation to everyone who believes. This is **great** news. It's the message of the gospel! This is what transformed the Apostle Paul, Martin Luther, Augustine and many of us.

Chapter 1 ended with a description of God's wrath on rebellious and wicked people who reject God. The moral or Jewish person listening to him would have applauded this. They were moral and self-righteous. They loved it when God judged immoral people. "Go get them, God!"

Our verses today, Romans 2:1-16, are addressed to that self-righteous person; the morally superior; the good rule follower. In these verses Paul has thoroughly built a case that the moral and so-called "religious" person needs the Gospel just as much as the immoral person.

Do you want to know if you are living in gratefulness for the salvation of Jesus like verse 4 is describing? Do you want to know if you are passing judgment on others? In a Bible study I did 14 years ago called "Gospel Transformation" I remember one week on self-righteousness. The exercise gave the following examples:

**Health-righteousness.** "You're not eating well. I had better enforce my dietary habits on you."

**Holiday-righteousness.** "How on earth can you do that on Christmas? Or Halloween? Don't you put a nativity scene in your yard?"

**Entertainment-righteousness.** "You spend that many hours a day watching TV?"

**My-righteousness.** "How dare you criticize me!"

**Theological-righteousness.** "How could you possibly hold that view?"

After we looked over the examples, we were assigned to ask God what our forms of self-righteousness were: I had decision-making righteousness and get-stuff-done righteousness.

My questions from a moment ago were: Do you want to know if you are living in gratefulness for the salvation of Jesus like verse 4 is describing? Do you want to know if you are passing judgment on others?

Look deeper. What forms of self-righteousness do you possess?

Paul is telling us in these verses today that we shouldn't pass judgment in this way because this is storing up God's wrath against us. Instead, we need the saving work of Jesus Christ to radically change us. As this change is occurring, we'll become more grateful and humble. And we'll see ourselves as Brennon Manning did, as one beggar sharing bread with another.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*