

***THE JUDGMENT OF GOD AND SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS***  
***ROMANS 2:1-4***

Sir Robert Watson Watt was instrumental in the creation of radio detection and ranging (what is commonly called “radar”). As early as 1915, Watson Watt was using radio technology to provide warnings to British pilots in the First World War. But it was 20 years later that he first successfully bounced a radio wave of a short-wave transmitter off a British bomber, proving that radar technology could work. It has been noted that Watson Wyatt’s invention was the single greatest factor in saving the RAF in the Battle of Britain against Germany in 1940. For his efforts, he was knighted, becoming Sir Robert, in 1942.

The epigraph to his story was written in 1956 when Sir Robert was driving in Canada and pulled over for speeding, caught by (you guessed it) a policeman using a radar gun. He then said, “If I’d known what they were going to do with it, I’d never have invented it!” And perhaps more humorously, he later wrote:

Pity Sir Robert Watson Watt  
Strange target of his radar plot,  
And this, with others I could mention,  
A victim of his own invention.  
His magical all-seeing eye  
Enabled cloud-bound planes to fly.  
But now by some ironic twist,  
It spots the speeding motorist.  
And bites, no doubt with legal wit,  
The hand that once created it.

My guess is that others of us could say the same thing — we have been ensnared by our own little plots — also victims of our own invention. This is most true of our own sin, of course. We know that sin is bad, but just how bad is it? Most people will affirm they sin, but just how bad of a problem is it that they sin?

How many times have you shared the gospel with someone, beginning with the problem of sin, had them agree with you that they are sinners, and then immediately affirm, “but I’m not a murderer or rapist or anything” — as if God is only interested in judging the worst of all people, but the generic sins of the masses are completely acceptable to Him?

Is this what God thinks about sin? Will God withhold his judgment from “good” people? Is repentance for sin necessary, or is God a grandfatherly “good guy” who will gladly overlook the infractions of “righteous” people?, One philosopher suggested, “God will forgive...it is his trade.” (Heine)

But the reality of who God is does not correspond to what most people think of God.

As we return this morning to the book of Romans (I hope to be here for quite a while now!), we resume our study in chapter 2. And here Paul is expanding his discussion about the judgment of God that he began in 1:18. In this passage, what Paul says is —

*GOD IS RIGHT IN ALL HIS JUDGMENTS AGAINST ALL SIN AND SINNERS.*

**Context** (the book of Romans in five minutes):

- ✓ The theme of the gospel in Romans (1:1-17)
- ✓ Ungodly Gentiles are sinners (1:18-32)
- ✓ “Godly” Jews are Sinners (2:1 – 3:8)

In these initial verses in Romans 2, we will see three realities about sin and judgment —

**1. The PROBLEM of the Self-Righteous (2:1)**

- ✓ “Self-righteous” people still SIN
- ✓ The sin of self-righteous people is SELF-CONDEMNING
- ✓ Self-righteous sinners need to see their need for A SAVIOR

**2. The REALITY of God’s Judgment (2:2-3)**

- ✓ God’s judgment is RIGHT (v. 2a)
- ✓ God’s judgment is EXTENSIVE (v. 2b)
- ✓ God’s judgment is INESCAPABLE (v. 3)

**3. The GRACE of God’s Judgment (2:4)**

**Context (the book of Romans in five minutes):**

• **The theme of the gospel in Romans (1:1-17)**

- ✓ Paul was writing the Romans to ask them to contribute to and serve as the base of his ministry in Spain (15:22ff). But because he was unknown to the church there, except by reputation, he wrote Romans as a doctrinal treatise, revealing and explaining his theology of the gospel.
- ✓ In this book, he shows every aspect of the gospel message — sin, salvation, sanctification, sovereignty, and service.
- ✓ And because these readers did not know him, he begins with a long introduction of himself to them (1:1-17) — and the gospel dominates in that introduction (vv. 1, 3, 5, 8, 13, 15-17).
- ✓ Paul begins his explanation of the gospel in 1:18 – 3:20 with his affirmation of the sinfulness of sinners and the necessity for the gospel to save men (they cannot save themselves).

• **Ungodly Gentiles are sinners (1:18-32)**

- ✓ Paul begins his explanation of sin with the Gentiles — the pagans are sinners, and under the condemnation of God, even now experiencing the wrath of God (v. 18).
- ✓ God has revealed Himself to them in creation so that they have no excuse for their rejection of Him (v. 20) and the perversity of their lives reflects the real condition of their hearts (v. 24) — they *want* sin and they don't want God. And the consequence is that God has judged and is judging them (vv. 24, 26, 28).
- ✓ All the “religious” people of Israel had to be in full agreement with these statements. And then Paul makes a dramatic shift in chapter two.

• **“Godly” Jews are Sinners (2:1 – 3:8)**

- ✓ In 2:1 Paul says, ***Therefore you have no excuse*** and there are two questions from that statement:
  - Who is he is addressing when he says ***you***? The word is not the plural y'all, but the singular. He is likely using a literary device called a “diatribe” in which he is addressing an opponent and objector to what he says. So he is speaking directly to those who object to God's wrath. Even more specifically, he is addressing Jews who think they will avoid the wrath of God because of their Jewishness. Paul doesn't mention the Jews by name until v. 17, but this whole section makes the most sense if he is speaking of Jews (and Gentile moralists); cf. vv. 3-4, 12ff
  - The other question is how is he using the term ***therefore***? What is he summarizing? Some have said he's just talking about vv. 29-32, but that doesn't make sense if he's talking about Jews; so it means that he's talking about all of 1:18-32. In 1:16 he explained that both Jew and Gentile need the gospel; he has demonstrated the Gentile's need for Christ, now ***therefore*** he will further demonstrate that Jews also need Christ and the gospel.

- ✓ These “self-righteous” and “godly” Jews certainly would have affirmed all of 1:18-32. But Paul is going to demonstrate that they too are in desperate need of the gospel (cf. also **10:3**).
- ✓ We might say, “but this is for the Jews — can’t we just move quickly past this since we aren’t Jews and this doesn’t relate to us?” But in fact, Paul is dealing with a category of person that is bigger than the Jews — he is dealing with all people who suppose themselves to be righteous and godly and not in need of God. He’s dealing with the kind of person (like a recent presidential candidate) who says, “I go to church and I love God and I love my church.” What about confession of sin? “I’m not sure I have [ever confessed sin to God]. I just go on and try to do a better job from there....I think if I do something wrong, I think, I just try to make it right. I don’t bring God into that picture. I don’t.” In other words, we can make our sin right without confessing it to God. We are adequate to effect our own righteousness. And that is the very kind of idea that fills our churches today and that is the attitude that Paul is addressing here and that is why we need this chapter! This chapter is for the religious and self-righteous who have never acknowledged their need for the gospel.
- In these initial verses in Romans 2, we will see three realities about sin and judgment —

**1. The PROBLEM of the Self-Righteous (2:1)** Here Paul offers three conditions of the self-righteous

• “Self-righteous” people still SIN

- ✓ The first thing that Paul says about these self-righteous individuals is that they are **without excuse**. The word is literally translated as without “apology.” It means they have no legal defense; they are culpable before God and they cannot defend themselves. Interestingly, Paul said the same thing about the pagan Gentiles (1:20). So both Jews and Gentiles are in the same inexcusable category.
- ✓ The reason that they are without excuse is not immediately apparent. They judge others; but that’s not the problem. The problem is that they are doing **the same things** as those whom they judge. The problem is not that they are condemning others for their lack of righteousness; the problem is that they have that same unrighteousness in them. They too are sinners.
- ✓ In fact, Paul emphasizes that when he says, **you judge another** — he is referring to another person who is different from him — but he’s his neighbor. He’s different, and yet he is still inherently the same. And what is the same is the sin nature that all men everywhere possess.
- ✓ The self-righteous person has made two mistakes:
  - He has overestimated his ability to be righteous (by comparing himself with others)
  - He has underestimated the righteousness of God
  - These were the problems of the Pharisees that Jesus addressed in Mt. 5:20ff.
- ✓ Paul is not necessarily saying that all the Jews are practicing all the same idolatries and sexual perversities of the pagans (1:24-27), but he is saying that they are engaging in the same categories of sins as in 1:28-32. All men are guilty of sin. Even “self-righteous” people.

- ✓ Are you a self-righteous person? Are you overlooking your own sin and vilifying others? Here is a test compiled by another pastor [Pennington]:
  1. Have you ever loved anything more than God?
  2. Have you ever failed to worship God in the way He prescribes to be worshiped?
  3. Have you ever used anything related to God in a disrespectful way?
  4. Have you ever neglected to gather each week with others to worship God as He commands?
  5. Have you ever been disrespectful to the authorities that God has put into your life?
  6. Have you ever been angry with someone in your heart, or have you ever expressed that anger in violent words or in violent action?
  7. Have you ever been engaged in sex, either in your mind or with your body, with someone other than your spouse?
  8. Have you ever taken something from someone that didn't belong to you?
  9. Have you ever lied or intentionally misrepresented the truth to your advantage?
  10. Have you ever longed to have something that belongs to someone else?
- ✓ Those questions are from the Ten Commandments. We have all broken all those commandments — many times, which means we are no different than unbelieving pagans. We have all done exactly ***the same things*** (2:1). Even “self-righteous” people are sinners. All have sinned.

- The sin of self-righteous people is **SELF-CONDEMNING**

- ✓ The result of this sin is that the self-righteous person who thinks he is in good standing with God (in the Jew's case, because of his Jewishness) is in fact condemned.
- ✓ One of the great tragedies of self-righteousness is that it is not only self-condemning, but it is also self-blinding. The sin of the self-righteous man is evident to his wife and children and friends; but he is blind to it and cannot see it himself. So Calvin says, “No one knows the one-hundredth part of the sin that clings to his soul.”
  - The self-blinding nature of self-righteousness was true with the nation of Israel (cf. Amos 2:4ff after Amos 1:3ff).
  - The self-blinding nature of self-righteousness was true of David in his sin with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 12:7 after 2 Sam. 12:1-6).
  - Every one of us is prone to let the little foxes of sin into our lives because we do not believe the deadliness of them or God's moral obligation to judge them.
  - Al Capone (the infamous gangster) is reputed to have said about himself, “I have spent the best years of my life giving people the lighter pleasures, helping them to have a good time and all I get is abuse. The existence of a hunted man.” Poor Al Capone, so misunderstood and maligned. That's just how blinding self-righteousness is, and that's how Satan would have it (2 Cor. 4:4).
- ✓ And notice that what Paul says about these self-righteous people is all-inclusive — ***everyone*** who passes judgment. This is true of *everyone* who does this. “This is a universal trait in man.” [Shedd]

- ✓ Paul says that the moment someone condemns another person for some sin without recognizing his own sinfulness ***you condemn yourself***. When one does that he not only (rightly) judges the other sinner, but he also judges himself — he pronounces his own guilt and sentence. While God *will* pass judgment on them, they have even failed even in the lower court of their own soul. They not only can't pass the test of God, they can't even pass their own test. No one can.

- Self-righteous sinners need to see their need for **A SAVIOR**

- ✓ The self-righteous person spends his life not only accusing others of sin, but avoiding the reality of his own sin. He is guilty and the greatest gift he can be given is to comprehend that guilt.
- ✓ As long as he doesn't perceive his sin, he won't long for a Savior. That's why Jesus said that He did not come to save the righteous, but sinners (Mt. 9:9-13).
- ✓ "The most important thing in life is to know that Jesus is able to save you from sin. The second most important thing is to know that you need it." [James Boice]

"O the depth of the evil of sin! If ever you will see how great and horrid an evil sin is, measure it in your thoughts, either by the infinite holiness and excellency of God, who is wrong'd by it; or by the infinite sufferings of Christ, who died to satisfy for it; and then you will have deeper apprehensions of the evil of sin."  
 [John Flavel]

## 2. The **REALITY** of God's Judgment (2:2-3)

- God's judgment is **RIGHT** (v. 2a)

- ✓ When Paul says ***we know*** he is engaging the person who is in opposition to him and affirming that while they have different ideas about righteousness and justice, there is one basic truth on which they agree. It is generally accepted by all men, including the "self-righteous."
- ✓ The truth that is agreed upon is not just that God will judge sin, but that the judgment of God against sinners who do these kinds of things (vv. 28-32) is ***right***. It ***rightly falls upon those...***
- ✓ Paul uses the word "truth" to denote God's actions — when God judges, it is done in accordance with His truthfulness. There is nothing erroneous about God's judgment. It is always right.
- ✓ God's judgment against sin is in accordance with all the facts — He has all the facts about the sin that is committed and He has all the facts about His righteous standard. Everything is in accordance with the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. There is nothing perverted in God's judgment of sin. God is always right in all His judgments.

- *Rom. 3:4 May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar, as it is written, "THAT YOU MAY BE JUSTIFIED IN YOUR WORDS, AND PREVAIL WHEN YOU ARE JUDGED."*
- *Rom. 9:14 What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!*
- *Psa. 9:4 For You have maintained my just cause; You have sat on the throne judging righteously.*

- *Ps. 9:8 And He will judge the world in righteousness; He will execute judgment for the peoples with equity.*
- *Psa. 96:13 Before the LORD, for He is coming, For He is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness And the peoples in His faithfulness.*
- *Psa. 145:17 The LORD is righteous in all His ways And kind in all His deeds.*
- *Is. 45:19 "I have not spoken in secret, In some dark land; I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, 'Seek Me in a waste place'; I, the LORD, speak righteousness, Declaring things that are upright.*

✓ God will judge and every judgment He makes will be right.

• God's judgment is **EXTENSIVE** (v. 2b)

- ✓ The judgment of God is not only right, but it is **upon those who practice such things**. The force is that there is no one who escapes this judgment.
- ✓ The self-righteous person is hoping that God will judge him by a different standard than God uses on all other people. He wants exact judgment for others and superficial and lenient judgment for himself. This verse affirms that God will judge exactly and rightly on every individual.
- ✓ So one writer has said, "God's truth and equity govern his judgments and there are special privileges for none." [John Murray]
- ✓ If you are banking on lenience from the God of Heaven because of some supposed privilege know that you will not receive that, apart from the grace that comes from trusting in Christ.
- ✓ God knows all men and He will judge all men according to the one standard of righteousness and apart from Christ, all men will fail that test (Heb. 4:13). Men have always sought to escape God and they will seek to avoid His final wrath (Rev. 6:15-17). But no one may escape the wrath of God.
- ✓ And that's exactly what Paul says about God's judgment in v. 3 —

• God's judgment is **INESCAPABLE** (v. 3)

- ✓ From the way Paul addresses his opponent, **O man**, it appears that this man believes he can do the very thing that Paul says he cannot do.
- ✓ This man has reasoned in his heart — he has **supposed** that he can escape God's judgment.
  - His reasoning is that he is protected by the covenant of God with Abraham (and God *will* still keep that covenant and redeem the nation of Israel).
  - But the reality is that he is condemned by the Law (v. 12b). God is not partial — both Gentile and Jew will equally and fully be condemned by God for their sin. Sin is sin; no matter who does it, it will be condemned.
- ✓ If anyone does **the same thing** the pagan Gentiles do in rejecting God (and all men have done those very things) then there is no escape from the wrath of God.
- ✓ In fact, when Paul asks, **will you escape...?** the **you** is emphatic — "Do you think that *you*, of all people, will escape?" There is no hope for the Gentile, the moralist, or the self-righteous Jew.
- ✓ God will judge all men. Paul wants his opponent to feel the weight of that statement.

### 3. The GRACE of God's Judgment (2:4)

- The one hope for all men to avoid the judgment of God is the righteousness of Christ.
- There is no hope for the self-righteous. But there is every hope for the Christ-righteous.
- And so while God is righteous and will judge and that judgment is inescapable, there is also kindness and tolerance and patience in God that is extended to all men so that they will be led to **repentance**.
  - ✓ God would be perfectly right in condemning men for the first sin they commit. But He doesn't. He is so very **tolerant** and **waits** long before condemning and judging men for their sin.
  - ✓ God is just and glorified when He judges men, but He was also just when He poured out His wrath on Christ for sin, and He demonstrates His grace when He waits for sinners to come to a knowledge of that truth, turn from their sin, and embrace Christ as their Lord and Master.
  - ✓ Peter affirms this same truth (2 Pt. 3:9) — God *wants* us to repent. So He is willing to wait.
  - ✓ Don't presume that because God doesn't judge your sin immediately that He doesn't care about your sin. He does care. He's just very patient in waiting for your repentance.
- This is God's grace in the midst of His judgment.
  - ✓ Many despise the judgment and wrath of God more than any other attribute of God.
  - ✓ They fail to see the justice of God's judgment. And they fail to see the grace in His judgment. He has been kind in withholding what is deserved for so long. So long. And that is only because of His grace. God is a judging God. But even in that judgment is grace.
  - ✓ If you are one of these unrepentant, self-righteous people who believes you have no need of God and Christ and His righteousness, may I urge you to reconsider your position? God will judge. He has not judged yet, only because He is patient and waiting for you to repent. Make today the day of that repentance. Give up your sin of self-righteousness and pride and embrace Christ as your only and great treasure. And then you will have a righteousness that is acceptable to God — not your pathetic little insignificant deeds, but the complete and full righteousness of Christ.



**CONCLUSION:** In his book, *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis writes about categories of sin and considers whether sexual sins are the worst of sins:

“If anyone thinks that Christians regard unchastity as the supreme vice, he is quite wrong. The sins of the flesh are bad, but they are the least bad of all sins. All of the worst pleasures are purely spiritual: the pleasure of putting other people in the wrong, of bossing and patronising and spoiling sport, and back-biting, the pleasures of power, of hatred. For there are two things inside me, competing with the human self which I must try to become. They are the Animal self and the Diabolical self. The Diabolical self is the worse of the two. This is why a cold, self-righteous prig who goes regularly to church may be far nearer to hell than a prostitute. But of course, it is better to be neither.”

Lewis is in good company in condemning self-righteousness. That was what Jesus attacked in the Pharisees and that was what Paul began to attack in these opening verses in Romans 2. We cannot be self-righteous and be saved. Our self-righteousness, if we depend on it, becomes our self-condemnation.

But the good news is that if we condemn our self-righteousness and appeal to Christ as Savior, then we have life and hope. That is the gospel; that is what Paul preached; and that is our only hope.

**BENEDICTION:** Jude 24-25