

THE REALITY OF GOD'S JUDGMENT
ROMANS 2:1-4

Just about the only time people enjoy hearing about the judgment of God is when it is spoken against. The world mocks and hates the judgment of God because it cannot bear the thought of it being real. And many believers don't like to talk or hear about the judgment of God because of concerns for loved ones who they believe will suffer under that judgment and because it makes them seem intolerant and ungracious. J. I. Packer was correct when he noted,

“...the subject of divine wrath has become taboo in modern society, and Christians by and large have accepted the taboo and conditioned themselves never to raise the matter.

“...[And yet] one of the most striking things about the Bible is the vigour with which both Testaments emphasize the reality and terror of God's wrath....

“The Bible labours the point that just as God is good to those who trust Him, so He is terrible to those who do not.” [*Knowing God*, 134-5.]

This is true of all people who do not trust Christ — unbelieving pagans who thoroughly reject God and His truth, against all the evidence of God's creation (Rom. 1:18-20ff), and it is also true of “religious” people who appear to want God and who appear to be “righteous.” God's judgment is against all those who reject Him and lean on their own righteousness for their standing before Him.

And yet as the apostle Paul speaks about the judgment of God to the Romans, he not only points out the reality of God's judgment, but also the grace that is behind the judgment of God. Like a black velvet cloth that heightens the brilliance of a diamond, so the judgment of God serves as a fitting background to heighten and illuminate the dazzling grace of God. And that is the theme of the passage we are considering this morning. Here is the theme of the opening verses of Romans 2:

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

In these verses we find three realities about God's real judgment:

1. **God's Judgment is Against SINNERS (2:1)**
2. **God's Judgment is REAL (2:2-3)**
3. **God's Judgment Works with God's GRACE (2:4)**

1. God's Judgment is Against **SINNERS** (2:1)

- It is the tendency of the human heart to see sin in others and overlook sin in ourselves. That was why Jesus said what He did in Matthew 7 about the log and the speck. And that tendency is why Paul says what he does in Romans 2 about the “self-righteous” Jews who think they do not have to fear God.
- Paul says very clearly that these self-righteous individuals 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 problem for the self-righteous people in 2:1ff 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. We have all done exactly **the same things** (2:1). Even “self-righteous” people are sinners. All have sinned. And because all sin, all can expect the judgment of God.
 - ✓ Paul goes to great lengths in these opening chapters to demonstrate the extensiveness of man’s sin. He will culminate in 3:10 — “there is none righteous, not even one,” and 3:23 — “all have sinned.”
 - ✓ And if you ever want to see just how horrid and evil your sin is (to paraphrase John Flavel), contrast it to the infinitely holy God against whom you sin, and meditate on the suffering of the infinite and perfect Savior who died to satisfy God’s wrath against your sin.

2. God's Judgment is **REAL** (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.
 - It is true in relation to His standard; so His truth reveals what is righteousness and what is sin and what all men must attain to be right before Him. God’s standard is true.

- Because God is true, He *must* judge sin. There is no moral justice if sin is left unjudged and unpunished. (That's one of our complaints against corrupt judges.)

"To show that wickedness is deplorable and morally wrong, as God knows perfectly and fully, he must bring the unrepentant wicked to their day of retribution....There must be a day of reckoning [Rom. 3:4] in which the truthfulness and righteousness of God is put on display such that the lies and wickedness and disobedience of sinners will be shown for what they are." [Bruce Ware, "Vengeance is Mine."]

- And His judgment is also true in that He doesn't misjudge anyone. We regularly misjudge and misevaluate people and their actions and motives. But God never does. He always judges every person exactly rightly. No one can legitimately complain that God judged him erroneously.

- *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. The most common complaint against God is probably about His wrath and judgment: "it's not fair..."
- ✓ This verse points out most clearly that the judgment against the sinner is in accordance with truth. It's a moral standard that has been upheld and must be upheld. *God's judgment is right.*

"God's wrath in the Bible is never the capricious, self-indulgent, irritable, morally ignoble thing that human anger so often is. It is, instead, a right and necessary reaction to objective moral evil. God is only angry where anger is called for. Even among men, there is such a thing as *righteous* indignation, though it is, perhaps, rarely found. But all God's indignation is righteous." [Packer, *Knowing God*, 136.]

- ✓ God's judgment is real. And the first reality of His judgment is that it is always right. This is a threat to every unbeliever (including "self-righteous" ones); it is also a comfort to believers that He will rectify every wrong. The second reality of God's judgment is that it is extensive.

- 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]
 - The self-righteous moralist judges others to be sinners and himself to be righteous because he is judging with a skewed and corrupt perspective and standard. God doesn't judge that way.
 - As John MacArthur has noted [*Romans 1-8*, 116],

"The secret hope of the hypocrite is that God will somehow judge him by a standard lower than perfect truth and righteousness. He knows enough to recognize the wickedness of his heart, but he hopes vainly that God will judge him in the same superficial way that most others judge him and that he judges himself. He plays a kind of religious charade, wanting to be judged by his appearance rather than by his true character."

- ✓ 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 will escape the wrath of God by his own standard and achievement of righteousness.
- ✓ And that's exactly what Paul says about God's judgment in v. 3, the third reality of God's judgment:

- 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; 9:6ff). 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.

“Men may refuse subjection to God as a lawgiver. They may shake off the yoke of his laws by rebellion. Yet they cannot withdraw themselves from his judgment. Although they will not have God for their lawgiver, yet they shall have him for their judge. The strongest of creatures can do nothing to control God, or to avoid him while acting in his judicial capacity. He is able to bring them to his judgment seat, and is also able to execute the sentence which he shall pronounce.” [Jonathan Edwards]

- It is sobering to be confronted with these three realities of God’s judgment — it is right, extensive, and inescapable. This is the condition of the Gentiles; and it is the condition of the self-righteous Jews.
- There are no morally upright people before God who gain that status on their own. The person who comes to God on his own merit comes as a man who is already condemned (vv. 1, 3; 1:18).
- This truth is designed to make men fearful.
 - ✓ God has an absolute standard of righteousness that no one can attain.
 - ✓ God has promised judgment and wrath on all those who aren’t righteous.
 - ✓ God is powerful enough to do what He has promised to all sinners (Jer. 32:17-20; Rev. 20:12-13).
 - ✓ The only appropriate response to these truths is fear (terror) at falling into the hands of a righteous God if we are not righteous (2 Cor. 5:10-11; Heb. 10:31).

“If a person is going to treat sin lightly, he must first refuse to take God’s judgment seriously. When we understand that God’s judgment on sin is absolutely right, that it is not too much or too little, and that His judgment on the smallest of sins is ultimately eternal death — meaning that the smallest deviation from His law, in God’s eyes, is worthy of an eternity in hell — then we will understand how terrible it is to disobey God.” [Mack, *A Fight to the Death*, 53.]

3. God’s Judgment Works with God’s GRACE (2:4)

“No one can know the true grace of God who has not first known the fear of God.” [Tozer]

- 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.
- God’s grace is offered to lead sinners to REPENTANCE
 - ✓ ***Do you think lightly?***... means “to look down on...to despise...to have the wrong idea.” [BDAG]
 - To think lightly of the graciousness of God means we don’t think carefully about His grace, and we don’t give His grace enough weight in our lives.
 - Whenever we suppose that our righteousness is adequate or that God’s judgment is insignificant, we diminish the work of Christ on the cross and the kindness of God.

- ✓ Paul speaks about three particular attributes of God that this opponent does not consider rightly:
 - **the riches of His kindness** = This is God's rich kindness — a similar phrase is used in Eph. 2:7. God is benevolent and generous to all men — including sinners.
 - ... The kindness referred to here is not the kindness that produces salvation, but the kindness of common grace. It is rain and sun at the appropriate times and beautiful mountains and friendships and food and feelings and affections and government and laws and doctors and hospitals. It is His revelation in creation (1:20) and His law in the conscience (2:15). These things and a myriad more, God has poured out on both sinners and saints. Every person who has ever lived has been a recipient of this kindness.
 - ... And Paul says God's kindness is **rich** — it's lavish. God is not miserly or meager with His kindness. The Lord loves to extend His kindness because He is by nature infinitely kind.
 - **[His] tolerance** = This tolerance is different from the tolerance of the world. Worldly tolerance approves and affirms sinful things and calls them good. But God's tolerance says, "what was done was sin, but I am willing to endure this rebellion for a time before I execute My justice."
 - ... God's tolerance simply means that God does not immediately punish sinners after their sins.
 - ... But don't mistake this for "peace." This tolerance is not permanent. It is temporary. There is a limit to how long God will endure a sinner's sin. "If the sinner does nothing but sin, if he rejects the invitation to repent...then in due course he must face God with all his sin about him. God's [tolerance] is wonderful, and eloquent of his deep concern for people. But it is not forgiveness." [Morris, 112-13.]
 - **[His] patience** = the word is "long-suffering." Or as one writer suggested, God is "long-tempered" in contrast to those who are "short-tempered." He is calm and endures without complaint and irritation the provoking sins of those who are opposed to Him.
 - Put these three words together and what you have is a lavish explanation of God's grace. Yes, He is a God of judgment and wrath; but at the same time He is a God of grace. Why?
- ✓ The word order is particularly significant in this verse: "or of the riches of His kindness and the [His] tolerance and the [His] patience do you think lightly, not knowing...?"
 - The verbs **think lightly** and **not knowing** are next to each other, emphasizing the contrast between what the grace of God *has* produced in the Jews and what it *should have* produced.
 - God gives His common grace to change us; He does not give His grace so we can continue to indulge sin. God's grace should always lead us to repentance and turning away from our sin.
- ✓ His extends His grace to **lead you to repentance**. Common grace should lead to particular grace.
 - These self-righteous people have presumed by God's lack of immediate judgment that God does not care about sin. They do **not know** that God's patience has a different purpose. They have ignored the reality of why God has extended His grace.
 - "God's purpose in his kindness is not to excuse sin but to stimulate repentance." [Moo]
 - What is this repentance? It is a change of mind about our sin that results in changed behavior.

- Do not confuse repentance with remorse. Repentance may be sorrowful, but godly sorrow will also result in a changed manner of life.
- Now what is the repentance that Paul is particularly thinking about here? It is repentance about what the self-righteous man thinks about himself. When we repent of self-righteousness, we stop trusting ourselves for righteousness and flee to Christ for His righteousness. Only Christ's righteousness is adequate to save us; and all of Christ's righteousness has been made available to us to save us. We just need to repent and turn to Him and that is exactly what we will have. Cf. Acts 5:31; 11:18; 13:24.
- ✓ And understand this — if we have Christ's righteousness, we do not have God's wrath. This is Paul's repeated appeal through this chapter. All men — even "self-righteous" men are sinners and in need of a Savior. And the Savior has been made available to all men through God's grace:

"If we are Christ's, through faith, then we are justified through His cross, and the wrath will never touch us, neither here nor hereafter. Jesus 'delivers us from the wrath to come' (1 Thessalonians 1:10; RSV)." [Packer, *Knowing God*, 141.]

"Our peace does not come from our removing the God of wrath from our thinking, but from his removing his wrath from us. He has done that by sending Jesus to die in our place so that, for everyone who believes in Jesus, God's wrath is taken away." [Piper, *What Jesus Demands from the World*, 93.]

All this means that —

- **God's judgment is not in conflict with God's GRACE**

- ✓ The gospel message that Paul explains in the book of Romans is about God's grace in saving sinners who do not deserve salvation. And God's wrath does not eliminate God's grace. In fact, later in the book, Paul will say that we really do not know the grace of God until we have considered the wrath of God (9:23).
- ✓ God's judgment and God's grace work together to exalt a wonderful Savior and a profound salvation. God is judge; God does judge and God will judge. And at the same time God is lavish and rich in His many expressions of grace.
- This is not what the world thinks about God's 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, He is gracious.
 - ✓ If you have received God's gracious salvation, you should also be particularly thankful this morning for your liberation from the judgment of God.

- ✓ If you are one of these unrepentant, self-righteous people who believe 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: When I was growing up, periodically my mother would fix calf-liver for dinner — I guess she wanted some iron-rich foods for us occasionally (and my dad also liked it). I know some of you like it; that was one of those meals I had to force myself to eat (the threat of a spanking for not eating was also a good motive).

Many think of the judgment and wrath of God in the same way. It is a truth that we don't like and we have to force ourselves to think about and accept. Yet if we want to know God in His fulness, if we want to be led away from sin and to genuine righteousness, if we want to know in more detail the beauty of God's grace, then we must accept, embrace, and even love the truth of God's judgment.

His judgment is God's commitment to truth and righteousness; and His judgment is the backdrop against which His grace sparkles and shines radiantly. God's judgment is real. And it is in accordance with His grace.

BENEDICTION: Romans 16:25-27