

Romans 2, Pt. 1

It is good news that God is righteous. God has integrity. He will judge the world according to the standard of his righteousness. Our hearts want this to be true because the truth of this statement means that the world can be something other than the chaos and pain which we find around ourselves. Our chapter today shows that part of the good news is that **God “will render to every man according to his works”** (Rom. 2:6). Let me give you an illustration to show why every single person, at some level, wants God to judge righteously.

Imagine a school that trained people to be auto mechanics. Every day the students demonstrate their knowledge by making some type of repair. After the repair has been attempted, the teacher comes through and evaluates the work of each person. Did he patch the radiator up correctly? Did she install the new belt properly? Would it be a good thing if the teacher evaluated the work with anything other than a precise, objective standard? Obviously, the answer is no. If the teacher did not evaluate objectively, then the students would not know if they had performed the repairs correctly. Consequently, they won't be able to accurately repair your car. No one would hire a mechanic who did what made him feel happy or what he thought was correct according to his own free decision. The mechanic must strive to make the right repairs in the right way. And for that to happen, there has to be an evaluation of their work rooted in **an objective standard**. Why would we ever think that somehow the operation and well-being of the world operates on a completely different set of principles? If God were not the judge, what havoc would we wreck in the world! Francis Schaeffer used to prophetically warn of the contemporary attempt to govern the world through **sociological law**. This is the idea that what 51% of a society believes to be right is, therefore, right. God does not wait around to see what people think is a good idea. He is the righteous God who establishes his righteous standards through the ways of judgment and mercy.

Our passage today is clear that God will deal not with what we abstractly know but with what we do. And this judgment of works will be inclusive. God sees not just the external action but the internal actions that precede what we do. He sees the heart. The judgment of our works is part of the good news that we preach to the world. We do, however, try and contrive other standards of judgment other than the objective standard of God, as he evaluates what we do. There are **three false standards of judgment established in this text**. We will take up the first two false standards of judgment today and cover the last false standard next week.

The quality or frequency of our judgment of others. This false standard occupies verses one through eleven. Paul lays out the problem clearly in v. 1: “Therefore you have no excuse, O man, whoever you are, when you judge another; for in passing judgment upon him you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things.” Paul is not saying that it is wrong to make judgments. **Humanity cannot live without judgments.** One of the most misunderstood verses in all the Bible is Jesus’s words in Matthew 7:1, “Judge not lest ye be judged.” Often, we use these words to imply that there is no clear moral standard or that we should never call an action immoral. But if we remember the words in the context of the Sermon on the Mount, we will quickly see that the Kingdom of God has a standard of righteousness beyond any human system. Jesus is not dealing with the issue of moral standards but with the issue of self-righteousness. Judging others is dangerous when one is blind to his own faults. Moreover, Jesus’s words require us to have a stronger doctrine of God’s judgment than we would have on our own. The specks and logs we find in our eyes are all meaningless if God is not an objective and righteous judge.

Paul is doing something similar in our text. The judgments made may be technically correct. But the quality of the judgment does not make up for the things which the judge personally does wrong. Verse three: “Do you suppose, O man, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgment of God?” In other words, a person’s ability to make moral judgments does not make up for her own immorality before the standard of God.

Let us turn back to Francis Schaeffer for a moment. Schaeffer often asked people to imagine a tape recorder hanging around their necks. Every moral judgment made in a day would be recorded on the tape. Most people know that if they could play the tape back at the end of the day, they would find that they have fallen short of their own moral standards. So again, there is no salvation in making clear moral judgments - if we can even do that - since **the problem is our own unrighteousness before God**. God will judge our wrongdoing not our ability to make judgments. “For he will render to every man according to his works.” Indeed, there is no partiality with God (v. 11).

The condition of our conscience. Paul takes up a second false standard of righteousness in verses twelve through sixteen. Here again is the good news of judgment - “on that day, when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus” (v. 16). Some people have knowledge of the law. Some people do not have knowledge of the law. But even those people who do not have knowledge of the law have **conscience**. Throughout history, there have been remarkable similarities in the moral standards of diverse peoples. Of course, many things are different from culture to culture, but think of the things which have generally been true. Family and property rights should be protected. There should be punishment for killing outside the context of warfare. Preservation of inheritance laws. Respect for authority figures. Rules for marriage and sexuality. The general idea that you should treat others in the way you wish to be treated. Cowardice is bad. Self-sacrifice is good. All these things and more form what C. S. Lewis once called **the Tao**. Lewis defines the *Tao* as “the doctrine of objective value, the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and others really false, to the kind of thing the universe is and the kind of things we are.” But knowledge of the Tao cannot help us with our unrighteousness, the internal and external things we do wrong. The conscience may indeed excuse us or accuse us, as v. 15 states. **But the conscience by itself does not warrant freedom from God’s righteous standard.** For the issue is the same as in the last section. The problem is what we do as it flows from the heart. It is the doers of the law who will be justified (v. 13). If we do something that we know to be wrong, what good does it do us to have this knowledge? God demands more from us than a developed conscience. Knowing right from wrong does not exempt us from God’s judgment.

The ability to make judgments and the condition of our consciences are two false standards of judgment. It is good for us to be able to make sound moral decisions. It is important for each of us to have a healthy conscience. But at the end of our lives, we still will have done things which displease our God. Paul is a practical guy. He knows what the history of the Bible teaches. He understands his own experience. He knows that he has sinned. He knows that all people have sinned. And it is those sins which must be reckoned with since God's judgment is according to works.

What does all of this mean practically? It means that God doesn't love and forgive people who are basically okay and just need a little help. The gospel is good news. It tells each of us that we have done wrong and that nothing can save us but the blood of Jesus. But it also teaches us that the blood of Jesus really does save us. So, thank God every day for the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ. Never lose sight of the truth that you need the Lord's mercy in your life. Never lose sight of the fact that your friends and neighbors need the Lord's mercy in their lives. They may believe themselves to be "good" people. But in the end, supposed goodness doesn't balance out the things which any of us actually do wrong. Coming from the right kind of family, growing up in the right kind of town, and having the right political or social views does not atone for actual sins. I have a burden on my heart. I have met too many people who get to the end of their lives, and think to themselves - "When I die, I will be judged by God. He will see my good deeds and my bad deeds. He will judge me. I hope that I have enough good deeds to go to heaven." The truth is that anyone who thinks like this will not and cannot ever meet such a standard. **None of us ever has enough good stuff in our hands to do anything to address the sheer immensity of the guilt that we have before a holy God.** Only the blood of Jesus can meet this standard. Only the work of Jesus - the righteous one - addresses the depths of our unrighteousness.