Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Principles of God's Judgment, Part 1
Scripture: Romans 2:1-3
Code: 45-17

INTRODUCTION

In Romans 1:18-32 the apostle Paul paints a striking picture of evil, debauched men and women. They've abandoned God and God abandons them to the consequences of their own sin.

A. Identifying the Moralist

However, at the end of Romans 1 a very important question remains unanswered: what about good people? What about those who aren't murderers, liars, thieves, fornicators, adulterers, and homosexuals? Where do the people fit who haven't abandoned all sense of right and wrong?

In this world are people who do not appear to be idolatrous or sinful--they may even identify with the true religion. In Paul's day they were the Jews. In our day they are professing Christians who want to uphold the moral standards of Scripture. But those who are not true believers are unable to maintain an external moral value system because they cannot restrain their own sinfulness. In essence they cover their darkened hearts with cloaks of light.

B. Exposing the Moralist

In Romans 2 Paul exposes the moralist. The moralist agrees with Paul's condemnation of the idolaters in chapter 1 because he sees himself as better and therefore uncondemned. But that produces a false sense of security. In Romans 3:19 Paul says, "We know that whatever things the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." A person understands the Christian gospel only when he understands he is guilty before God--whether immoral (chapter 1) or moral (chapter 2), whether Gentile (chapter 1) or Jew (chapter 2).

1. The Gentile

In Romans 2 Paul may have been referring to a person not necessarily of any particular religion who thinks he's moral because he upholds a moral, ethical code.

2. The Jew

It is most likely that Paul here had the Jewish people in mind. They would certainly agree with Paul's condemnation of the Gentile world, believing themselves exempt from any such judgment. They traditionally believed that God would destroy the Gentiles because of their sin, taking their lead from the prophet Jonah, who if he had his way, would have wiped out the Ninevehs of this world.

a) Salvation by nation

Because of both their physical and religious identification with Israel, the Jewish people assumed they were exempt from God's judgment. They were the chosen people. They expected to be regarded and treated not as individuals but as part of the nation. They thought there was no consequence to their personal sin because they believed they were under a national salvation.

b) Salvation by covenant

They also believed in salvation by their covenant, what we would call sacramentalism. Because they were circumcised on the eighth day and adhered to other such sacraments, they were in the covenant.

That basic thinking is prevalent in many Protestant churches today. For example, if a child is baptized as an infant, that sacramental act allows him entrance into the covenant. He is then confirmed when he is twelve. Those sacraments supposedly guarantee that the child will have a place in God's kingdom and not be condemned with the world.

So the Jews believed that by keeping the traditions and being sacramentally attached to the covenant, they were exempt from judgment. There are many people like that today. They've been baptized, they go to church, they keep the rules, and they are moral. But they're self-righteous. They don't think they will ever be judged. And they are the hardest people to reach with the gospel--much harder than reprobates who have hit bottom and have no other options.

With great force and clarity Paul pointed out that the ethical, moral person without Christ--whether Jew or Gentile--will find himself in the same hell as a pagan idolater. If the Gentile is without excuse, then the Jew is even more so because he had more information at his disposal. So Paul wanted the religious person who had outwardly identified himself with Judaism (or Christianity in today's terms) to know he wouldn't escape judgment if he was self-righteous.

LESSON

We see six principles of judgment in Romans 2:1-16. God judges all men and women on the basis of knowledge, truth, guilt, deeds, impartiality, and motive.

I. KNOWLEDGE (v. 1)

"Therefore, thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest; for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things."

A. The Implication

"Therefore" connects what Paul is going to say with what he said in the previous chapter. What was true of the people referred to in Romans 1:18-32 is also true of this new group. They also are without excuse.

Romans 1:18-19 says, "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness, because that which may be known of God is manifest in them." That is why verse 20 says they are without excuse. Thus when Romans 2:1 says, "Therefore, thou art inexcusable, O man," that implies this person also knows the truth.

He proves he knows the truth because he judges others. If he has a criterion with which to judge others, he must know the truth and is just as inexcusable.

1. Knowledge through natural revelation

It was clear the Gentiles knew the truth through natural revelation--the obvious existence of God as seen in all creation--from what Paul said in Romans 1:19-20. What was true of them is also true of the Jewish people according to chapter 2.

2. Knowledge through conscience

Romans 2:14 says, "The Gentiles, who have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law." Both Jews and Gentiles have an innate knowledge of right and wrong via the conscience.

3. Knowledge through the law of God

a) Romans 3:1-2--"What advantage, then, hath the Jew? Or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way, chiefly because unto them were committed the oracles of God." The Jewish people had the truth of God in written form. Therefore they were just as inexcusable--if not more inexcusable--for they had not only the light of nature and conscience, but also the revealed Word of God.

b) Romans 9:4--"[To the] Israelites ... pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came." They had all the benefits and all the revelation, so they were

without excuse.

B. The Identification

The phrase "O man" (cf. Rom. 2:3; 9:20) is a general reference to any moralist who thinks he's exempt from judgment because he hasn't sunk to idolatry, homosexuality, or any other reprobate activity.

Paul says the man of Romans 2 is inexcusable because he had knowledge. In fact, he even had a more complete knowledge, so he was even more inexcusable. Some of the Jews of Paul's day who would have been exposed to this chapter knew all about Christ yet rejected Him. That put them in the category referred to in Hebrews 10:29: "Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, with which he was sanctified, an unholy thing?"

"Whosoever thou art that judgest" (Rom. 2:1) indicates that the moralist knew God's standards since he applied them to someone else. Anyone who sits in the seat of moral judgment and condemns others for their sin proves that he himself is inexcusable. Romans 1:32 says that even pagans know "the judgment of God, that they who commit such things are worthy of death." Even pagans know what is right and wrong. The moralist is like a judge who condemns a criminal by applying the law--by doing so he makes himself responsible to keep that same law if he's going to sit in judgment on others.

C. The Condemnation

1. The proof

In Romans 2:1 Paul says to the moralist, "Wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself." He was restating what our Lord said in Matthew 7:1: "Judge not, that ye be not judged." Now that doesn't mean we shouldn't make a proper evaluation of things. In verses 15-20 Jesus says we're to examine the fruit of those who claim to speak for God. But in verse 1 Jesus is telling us to stop criticizing and condemning people. Stop finding fault with others. Stop being self-righteous. Stop impugning people's motives when you can't read their hearts. Stop pushing your criticism to the point where you're playing God.

In Verse 2 Jesus says, "With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye measure, it shall be measured to you again." That's why James 3:1 says, "Be not many teachers, knowing that we shall receive the greater judgment." Why is a teacher's condemnation greater? Because the more he knows, the more he condemns himself if he doesn't act in accord with his knowledge. The Lord then went on to teach that before you try to remove the splinter out of your

brother's eye, you ought to get the two-by-four out of your own eye first (Matt. 7:3-5). It's a fatal human tendency to exaggerate the faults of others and minimize our own.

2. The practice

Why do the judgments of moralists result in their own condemnation? Romans 2:1 says, "Thou that judgest doest the same things." The moralist claims he doesn't do the things the pagan does. He claims he doesn't commit those sins--that he's a moral man who keeps the law of God. Like the rich young ruler he says, "All these things [the Ten Commandments] have I kept from my youth up" (Matt. 19:20). What an illusion!

a) Matthew 5:21-22--Jesus said, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old [your rabbis taught you], Thou shalt not kill and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of judgment; but I say unto you that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire." The moralists our Lord addressed did not actually murder someone, but were killing people in their hearts. They were able to refrain from actual murder because they sought so hard to be self-righteous and to be looked up to favorably. But inside they were murderers. False religion cannot restrain sin in the heart, although it can mask it with self-righteousness.

b) Matthew 5:27-28--"Ye have heard that it was said by them of old, Thou shalt not commit adultery; but I say unto you that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery already in his heart."

c) Matthew 5:31-32--They also committed adultery through divorce. When they wanted to commit adultery, they divorced their current spouse and married the other woman to legalize their adultery.

d) Matthew 5:33--"Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old, Thou shalt not perjure thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths." People offered oaths continually to impress others with their sincerity. But as long as they swore by something other than God, they believed they didn't have to fulfill their oath. For example, if someone swore by heaven to pay a debt but then reneged, he could say he didn't make the oath to God so he didn't have to honor it. While they took oaths to fulfill the rabbinic traditions, they were liars at heart.

e) Matthew 5:38--"Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." Essentially the rabbis were establishing vengeance as every man's God-given right. But that statement was for use in the law courts to insure the punishment fir the crime, , not for personal vengeance. Jesus said, "Resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also" (v. 39).

Self-righteous people make two fatal mistakes: they misunderstand the height of God's law that encompasses the internal man, and they misunderstand the depth of their sin. The logic of our Lord is clear and convincing. Those who condemn others prove that they know the law. But through that knowledge they condemn themselves because they do the same things. The conscience that makes one aware of wrong in others writes one's own sentence.

Likewise Romans 2 makes it clear that the moralist is just as bad as everyone else; he just happens to cover up his sin. He who claims he's moral and religious because he's basically good, goes to church, and has been baptized may only be restraining the flesh externally but internally is full of unrestrained evil. And he will be judged for it.

II. TRUTH (vv. 2-3)

A. Righteous Judgment (v. 2)

"We are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them who commit such things."

"Such things" refers to the evils mentioned in chapter 1. "We are sure [Gk., oidamen]" tells us it's an obvious, basic principle that the judgment of God is according to truth. Why? Because God cannot lie (Titus 1:2). God is truth--that's His nature.

1. Genesis 18:25--"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" We will be judged according to the truth.

2. Romans 3:4--"Let God be true, but every man a liar." It is God's nature to be true, and He will judge everything with truth.

3. Romans 9:14--Paul said, "Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid." God never does anything or makes any evaluation that isn't correct.

4. Psalm 9:4, 8--"Thou hast maintained my right and my cause; thou didst sit on the throne judging right.... and he shall judge the world in righteousness."

5. Psalm 96:12-13--"Rejoice before the Lord; for he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth; he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with his truth." Our perception of things is often distorted, but not so with God.

6. Psalm 145:17--"The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works." That refers to His works of judgment as well as any other works.

7. Isaiah 45:19--"I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth. I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain; I, the Lord, speak righteousness, I declare things that are right."

Abusing God's Grace

There is something in us that makes us tend to exonerate ourselves. We say things like, "God would never judge me," "I'm basically a good person," or "It will all be all right in the end." We are so used to God's mercy that we take it for granted. Since God doesn't kill us when we sin, we don't expect to be killed. Yet the Bible says that the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). Every time you sin God has a perfect right to snuff out your life. But we are so used to mercy that instead of seeing it for what it is, we abuse it instead of being grateful for His graciousness.

8. 1 Corinthians 4:3--Paul said, "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment; yea, I judge not mine own self." He was not at all concerned about how others judged him because he was well aware that man's judgment of himself and others is hopelessly distorted. Then Paul said, "I know nothing against myself; yet am I not hereby justified; but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore, judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts" (vv. 4-5). Man's judgment does not square with the facts, but God's does. The problem with the moralist is that he thinks he is righteous because he judges himself by himself.

9. Hebrews 4:13--"Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight, but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." Every sin you have ever committed might just as well have been played on a full-sized screen in front of God. Every evil thought, word, or deed has been committed in His presence. Although we know He hates sin, we continue to sin in front of Him. The writer of Hebrews said, "Seeing, then, that we have a great high priest ... Jesus, the Son of God, let us ... come boldly" (vv. 14, 16). If we understand we are constantly exposed to God, we had better run to the One who can mediate between us and God--the Lord Jesus.

God's judgment is not predicated on outward appearance or profession but on truth. The hypocrite hopes that God will judge him by something other than the truth. He hides behind his national identity, church affiliation, baptism, adherence to rules, or morality. But whereas man looks at the outward appearance, God looks at the heart (1 Sam. 16:7). Today many people who go to church--whether they're Lutheran, Presbyterian, Baptist, Catholic, Episcopalian, or any other denomination or non-denomination--think they're going to escape God's judgment even though they may sit in judgment on an immoral world while in their hearts they're filled with the same immorality. They're like whited sepulchers: washed clean on the outside but inside full of dead men's bones (Matt. 23:27).

B. Personal Application (v. 3)

"Thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them who do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?"

1. The intensity

The Greek word translated "thinkest" (logizomai) means "to estimate" or "calculate." The intensity of verse 3 is lost in English. In his commentary on this verse Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse paraphrased it as: "You dummy--do you really figure that you have doped out an angle that will let you go up against God and get away with it? You don't have a ghost of a chance." Then Barnhouse said, "There is no escape. Do you understand? No escape--ever. And this means you-- the respectable person, sitting in judgment upon another fellow creature, and remaining unrepentant yourself" (God's Wrath: Romans 2:1--3:20 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953], p. 18).

2. The indictment

Verse 3 tells us that the moralist cannot avoid being judged and that when he is judged, he will not be able to avoid being condemned. When he is condemned he will not be able to avoid being executed.

3. The implications

a) 1 John 3:20--"If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." God has built within us a conscience. It is like pain. Pain calls you to a halt when your body is being injured. Your conscience calls you to a halt when your soul is being injured. Since our conscience condemns us, and a fallen one at that, can you imagine how great God's condemnation is, who is unfallen and eternally and infinitely holy?

b) Hebrews 12:25-29--"See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spoke on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore, receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear; for our God is a consuming fire."

That is a comparison with Israel at Mount Sinai. The people didn't escape when they refused to hear the voice of God that thundered out of the mountain. That nation died in the wilderness. If they didn't escape when God spoke from earth, do you suppose anyone will escape when he or she refuses to listen when God speaks the gospel from heaven? How much greater the judgment when God speaks

from a heavenly throne than from an earthly mountain.

c) Hebrews 2:2-3--"If the word [the Mosaic law given at Sinai] spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord?" Since people were judged for denying a law spoken by angels, how much more will we be judged for denying a law spoken by Christ Himself, who is greater than angels?

CONCLUSION

God knows everything about us, but the people around us don't. They may know some things but not everything. We don't even know all our innermost motives, and we're hopelessly biased in our own favor. However, you will be judged on the basis of the truth and your knowledge of God.

If you know you're not right with God--that you're playing a religious game and condemning the sin in others while knowing that it's boiling within you--you need to run to Jesus Christ. He has already paid the penalty. He has already received the judgment of God on your behalf.

Satisfying Love and Law

Tribes once roamed the Soviet expanse much like Indian tribes roamed the Americas. The tribes that controlled the best hunting grounds and the choicest natural resources had the strongest and wisest leaders. I heard about one particular tribe whose success was due to the fairness and wisdom of the laws that their great leader made and enforced. His word was law. One of his greatest laws was that parents must be loved and honored. Other laws included murder as punishable by death, and stealing required severe punishment.

The tribe was prospering greatly when a disturbing thing began to occur. Someone in the tribe was stealing. It was reported to the great leader. He sent out a proclamation that when the thief was caught, he would receive ten lashes from the tribal whip master. The thievery continued despite the warnings, so he raised the punishment to twenty. Still it continued, so he raised it to thirty. Finally he raised it to forty. He knew that only one person in the tribe could survive such a severe lashing--himself.

Eventually the thief was caught. To the horror of everyone, it was the great leader's own aged mother. The people wondered what the leader would do. His law said that parents were to be loved and honored, yet thieves were to be whipped. Great arguments arose as the day of judgment approached. Would he satisfy his love and save his mother, or would he satisfy his law and watch his mother die under the whip? Soon tribal members were divided--they even bet on what he would do.

Finally the day came. The tribe gathered around the great compound. In the center was a large post driven into the ground. The leader's great throne sat in the place of prominence. With great pomp and ceremony the leader entered and took his place on the throne. The silence was deafening. His frail little mother was led into the compound between two towering warriors. They tied her to the post. The crowd murmured in debate: will he satisfy his love at the expense of his law, or his law at the expense of his love? The tribal whip master entered carrying a long leather whip. He was a powerful man with bulging muscles. As he approached the little woman, the warriors ripped her shirt off, exposing her frail little back to the cruelty of the lash. Everyone gasped. Was the leader really going to let her die?

The leader sat staring without moving. All eyes darted from him to the whip master and back again. The whip master took his stance, his great arm cracked the whip in the air as he prepared to bring the first lash upon her.

Just as the whip master started to bring his powerful arm forward with the first cutting stroke, the leader held up his hand to halt the punishment. A sigh of relief went up from the tribe. His love would be satisfied. But what about his law?

The leader rose from his throne and strode toward his mother. As he walked he removed his own shirt, throwing it aside. He then wrapped his great arms around his mother, exposing his huge muscular back to the whip master. Breaking the heavy silence he commanded, "Proceed with the punishment." Thus both his law and his love were satisfied.

Romans 6:23 says, "The wages of sin is death." Jesus wrapped His arms around you. He satisfied His love--He enabled us to escape God's wrath. He satisfied His law--He paid the penalty for sin. That's the genius of God and the gift of salvation.

Focusing on the Facts

1. Who are people who identify with God yet are not true believers (see p. 1)?

2. How did most of the Jewish people believe they were saved? Explain (see p. 2).

3. Explain how Paul used information from Romans 1:18-32 to explain what he says in Romans 2 (see p. 3).

4. In what three ways does the moralist prove he has knowledge of God (see p. 4)?

5. Why was the Jew especially responsible (see p. 5)?

6. Explain the phrase "whosoever thou art that judgest" (Rom. 2:1; see p. 5).

7. What teaching of Jesus was Paul reiterating in Romans 2:1? Explain it (see pp. 5-6).

8. Why does the moralist's judgment result in his own condemnation (Rom. 2:1; see p. 6)?

9. Give some scriptural examples of people who claim to have kept the law but in reality didn't (see pp. 6-7).

10. What basic principle is true regarding the judgment of God? Support your answer with Scripture (see p. 8).

11. What do we tend to do regarding God's grace? Explain (see p. 9).

12. Why was Paul not concerned about how others judged him (1 Cor. 4:3-5; see p. 9)?

13. What should be our response when we realize our sin is exposed to God (Heb. 4:16; see p. 9)?

14. What is the hypocrite's hope (see p. 9)?

15. According to Dr. Barnhouse, what is one way to paraphrase Romans 2:3 (see p. 10)?

16. What does Romans 2:3 tell us about the moralist (see p. 10)?

17. In what way is our conscience like pain (1 John 3:20; see p. 11)?

Pondering the Principles

1. Since you've been a Christian, have you gotten in the habit of being obedient externally but not giving much thought to what's inside? Read Matthew 5:21-48. Have any of those sins become characteristic of you? Which ones? To bring your thoughts captive to Christ (2 Cor. 10:4-5), you need to be studying God's Word daily. Discipline your mind to focus on Christ so that your natural responses are godly and not manufactured by your flesh.

2. Have you ever taken God's grace for granted? Give some examples if you have. Why do you suppose those who have been forgiven so much can forget what God has done? Make a list of things that have happened to you in the past where you could see God's grace at work. Now thank Him for His abundant grace. Begin to examine the events of each day and identify where God's grace is evident in your life.

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