

Principles of God's Judgment, Part 2

Scripture: Romans 2:4–5

Code: 45-18

REVIEW

In Romans 2:1-16 Paul establishes the basis of judgment that applies to everyone. Most particularly he focuses on the outwardly moral and religious person who wouldn't see himself with the reprobates referred to in chapter 1. We learn that God judges according to 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."

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."

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?" That is characteristic of those who say to the Lord that they've done many good things in His name (Matt. 7:22). Their claim is just a facade of religious externals. Jesus will say to such people, "I never knew you; depart from me" (v. 23). First Thessalonians 5:3 expresses the same thought: "When they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them." Men and women think they're secure until the judgment of God comes like a thunderbolt. Then there will be no escape. God keeps a perfect record of the thoughts, words, and deeds of every human being. That is the data by which God renders the ultimate verdict in divine judgment.

LESSON

III. GUILT (vv. 4-5)

"Despiseth thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." God has been good to mankind. He has been leading people to repentance, but they have been moving toward judgment instead. They are piling up a storehouse of guilt that will cave in on them in judgment.

The Worst Sin

All sin is ultimately against God, and the most heinous crime of all against His is to reject what He has done. All mankind is guilty of rejecting His goodness, abusing His mercy, ignoring His grace, spurning His love, and mocking His kindness.

Matthew Henry said in his commentary on Romans 2:4, "There is in every wilful sin an interpretative contempt of the goodness of God" (Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible, vol. 6 [N.Y.: Revell, n.d.]). Whenever you or I sin, we show contempt for God's goodness. The book of Hosea records God's [love](#) for wayward Israel. In Hosea 11:1 God says, "When Israel was a child, then I loved him." Then He says, "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love; and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid food before them.... and my people are bent to backsliding from me" (vv. 4, 7). With love, tenderness, graciousness, kindness, and mercy God

reached out to draw Israel to Him, yet they drew away from Him.

A. God's Goodness (v. 4)

"Despiseth thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?"

1. The devaluation of His goodness

The Greek word translated "despisest" means "to grossly underestimate the value or significance of something." It is a failure to assess true worth. Thus it refers to people who make light of the riches of God's goodness. Mercy despised is the blackest of sins. Every person alive on the face of the earth has personally experienced the goodness of God in many ways. The Lord causes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust (Matt. 5:45). He gives us food to eat, fire to keep us warm, and water to quench our thirst. He gives us a blue sky, a warm sun, green grass, and beautiful mountains. He gives us people to love. In every way God has demonstrated His goodness.

2. The depth of His goodness

a) "Goodness" (Gk. chr[ma]estot[ma]es) is translated "kindness" in the New American Standard in the list of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). It speaks of all God's benefits, His many kindnesses to mankind. b) "Forbearance" (Gk., anoch[ma]e) is the word for truce, for the cessation of hostilities, for the withholding of judgment. c) "Long-suffering" (Gk., makrothumia) refers to patience. It refers to one who has the power to avenge but doesn't use it. It is a great characteristic of God. Scripture is replete with references to the patience of God. He is patient with mankind because He doesn't want anyone to perish (2 Pet. 3:9). For long periods God is kind and withholds His judgment. He is "slow to anger, and of great kindness" (Neh. 9:17). God isn't just good, forbearing, and long-suffering; He exemplifies those attributes to their epitome. That great reality has been referred to as common grace, or the providence of God.

3. The demonstration of His goodness

a) As seen in the psalms (1) Psalm 52:1--"The goodness of God endureth continually." (2) Psalm 119:68--"Thou art good, and doest good."

(3) Psalm 33:5--"The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord." (4) Psalm 145:9--"His tender mercies are over all his works." (5) Psalm 107:8--"Oh, that men would praise the Lord for his goodness." b) As seen in the world Sadly enough most people don't see God as being good. They wonder how He can allow certain things to happen. They don't understand that God's goodness prevents man from falling over dead whenever he commits a sin. Because of the fall of man, He has every reason to wipe out the human race. Only because of His goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering are we able to take another breath. It is a case of mercy rejoicing against judgment (James 2:13). (1) The past God was especially good to Israel. He was good to the pagans in Noah's time. He waited 120 years for them to repent while Moses preached righteousness (2 Pet. 2:5). He was patient with the nations (Acts 14:16). He overlooked the times of their ignorance (Acts 17:30). He was so patient that He waited 700 years before judging Israel and 800 before judging Judah. (2) The present God is wonderfully patient with us today even though people sin at such a rapid rate. His divine law is trampled under foot. God Himself is openly despised and His name is blasphemed. Yet it is amazing He doesn't strike dead the people who do that to Him. Why doesn't God cut people down when they sin, as He did with Ananias and Sapphira? Why doesn't He cause the earth to open up and swallow us like Dathan and Abiram? What about apostates in Christendom and their toleration for every form of evil? How can He let that go on? Why doesn't the righteous wrath of heaven consume them? Indeed God has "endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction" (Rom. 9:22).

4. The design of His goodness

a) Inspected If you as a Christian have ever thought that God is unjust, you reveal how easy it is to learn to abuse the goodness of God. The goodness of God is designed to lead men to repentance (Rom. 2:4), to cause us to turn from sin to Him, to long for Him and His goodness, and make us thankful He let us live in spite of our sin. If you realize what you deserve, you'll thank God continually

that He doesn't strike you down. God's goodness and patience should lead us to repent with thankful hearts.b) RejectedBut men despise God's goodness. Even Christians can be guilty of that sin. One commentator said that almost everyone has a vague and undefined hope of impunity and a feeling that bad things can't happen to him. The Jewish people believed they were exempt from the judgment of God, and that's the belief of many people today. So they take advantage of God's goodness and providence. They enjoy the pleasures of life--the wonders of love, children, parents, friends, a spouse, beauty, fun, and all the delicacies of life that God gives--yet never offer a speck of repentance for their denial of God's glory.It's a terrible thing to be unthankful. Romans 1:21 condemns the heathen for failing to glorify God and being unthankful. The nineteenth-century German poet and critic Heinrich Heine reportedly said on his deathbed, "God will pardon me. It is His trade" (Edmond and Charles Goncourt, Journal, 23 Feb. 1863). Many of us fall into that trap. Because we're so used to mercy we go ahead and sin, figuring God will forgive us again.

B. Ultimate Judgment (v. 5)

"After thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

1. The problem

a) How people view themselvesSome people don't see God's nature as loving, good, and kind. They don't say, "Oh God, thank You for another day of life. Thank You for the partner I love. Thank You for not taking my life because of my sin." They take it all for granted, believing they're just getting what they deserve.

A great sickness has developed in contemporary evangelical Christianity that is built around self. The emphasis on self image, self esteem, and self worth is nothing more than humanistic worldliness. Selfism has twisted evangelicalism from a God-centered to a man-centered perspective. Salvation is now seen from the viewpoint of what can it do for us? That is a horrifying error.b) How people view GodPeople often see God as unjust. When one of our loved ones dies or is inflicted with a terrible disease, the first thought often is, "That's not fair. How can You do that, God?" We tend to question God's love and His acts.(1) The wrong perspectiveHow can people question God's goodness? By seeing history from the wrong perspective.(a) Lot's wifeAs we look at the Old Testament we see that God turned Lot's wife into a pillar of salt because she looked back at Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:26). On the surface God's action appears to be so arbitrary. People ask, "What kind of a God would dole out such cruel and whimsical punishment?"(b) The CanaanitesGod called for the extermination of every Canaanite. He even said, "Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones" (Ps. 137:9). What kind of a God would do that? Some people are so distressed by that that they conclude the God of the Old Testament is different from that of the New.(c) Aaron's sonsAaron had two sons: Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1). They had just been ordained as priests. Leviticus 10:1-2 says that afterwards they "took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord." Can you imagine how Aaron felt? He may have thought, God, they were just young men. They were merely excited about what they were doing. Couldn't You have just warned them not to be flippant about their ministry?(d) The FloodHow could God drown the whole world? It sure seems like cruel and unusual punishment.(e) Capital punishmentThere are nearly thirty-five sins listed in the Old Testament for which God prescribed the death penalty. They include such offenses as: hitting or cursing one's parents, murder, kidnapping, homosexuality, magic, violating the Sabbath, blasphemy, desecration, child sacrifice, contact with spiritualists, unlawful divorce, and false prophecy.People view God as too severe. They complain His punishment is arbitrary and whimsical. He kills one person yet lets someone else live. He doesn't always enforce the death penalty. Two young men commit a foolish act yet die because of it.Lord Platt, writing to The Times of London about the New English Bible, said, "Perhaps, now that it is written in a language all can understand,

the Old Testament will be seen for what it is, an obscene chronicle of man's cruelty to man, or worse perhaps, his cruelty to woman, and of man's selfishness and cupidity, backed up by his appeal to his god; a horror story if ever there was one. It is to be hoped that it will at last be proscribed as totally inappropriate to the ethical instruction of school-children" (3 March 1970; cited by John W. Wenham, *The Goodness of God* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1974], pp. 7-8). If you look at the Old Testament from a New Testament perspective, you'll get confused. We live under the goodness, mercy, and grace of God. We see God as unjust because we compare His justice with His mercy, not His mercy with His law.

(2) The right perspective

(a) God's original penalty was just. We cannot look at the Old Testament from the New Testament; we have to look at it from the beginning. In the Garden of Eden God clearly warned the first man, saying, "In the day that thou eatest [the forbidden fruit] thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). Romans 6:23 says, "The wages of sin is death." Ezekiel 18:4 says, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." At creation all sin was a capital offense. God created man freely of His own choice. He made man to radiate His image and manifest His person. But man rebelled. Since God freely made man, giving him life and the conditions to continue that life, He has every right to take that life back if man chooses to violate those conditions. Whenever we sin, we strike a blow at God's sovereign character and misrepresent His image and intention for us. If God takes back what He freely gave us because we violated His conditions, is that unfair? No, because He clearly established the conditions.

(b) God was merciful. Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, but they didn't die. They didn't receive justice; they received mercy. But there needed to be a substitute for Adam and Eve to satisfy God's justice, and Jesus Christ was that substitute. Originally every sin required death. By the time the Mosaic law was instituted, only some thirty offenses required the death penalty. That is not cruel and unusual punishment but an amazing reduction in the severity of God's judgment. Originally any sin required death, but God reduced it to just over thirty. Even in the case of those offenses, there were times when God didn't enact His justice but spared the lives of the offenders. People were supposed to die when they committed adultery in marriage. But since the Israelites were so adulterous, God permitted them to divorce as a gracious alternative. The people were also to die for idolatry, but God forgave them many times. He was also merciful when they committed fornication or murder--many times He showed patience.

If you compare the Old Testament with God's original standard, you'll see that the Old Testament is full of mercy. But we are so used to His grace and mercy in getting away with our sin that we abuse God's goodness. Whenever He does do what is just, we think He's unjust. That's how confused we are, and that's how we despise His goodness. When God killed Ananias and Sapphira, people wondered how God could be so cruel. But they should have wondered how any in the congregation remained alive. They were all sinners.

(c) God has a right to judge. We so easily rely on His mercy and abuse His grace that if He didn't give us frequent examples of His justice, we would be much worse. So God will take a life or severely judge someone periodically to illustrate what should happen to those of us who are accustomed to His mercy. If we didn't have examples of the consequence of sin, we would go on blissfully trading on His mercy.

i) 1 Corinthians 10:8, 11-12--Verse 8 refers to people who committed fornication. God took the life of 23,000 of them. Verses 11-12 say, "All these things happened unto them for examples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come. Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." God gives us those examples to show us what should happen and to build an attitude of thanksgiving in our hearts. Every day we should thank God for being so merciful to overlook our sins. We would never tolerate the insubordination that God tolerates.

ii) Luke 13:1-5--"There were present at that season some that told him [Jesus] of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices." Apparently some Galilean Jews came to the Temple to offer their sacrifices. As they did, Pilate's men entered the Temple and slaughtered them so that their blood actually mingled with the blood of the their sacrifices. The people crowding around Jesus were not asking about Pilate's cruelty; they were questioning God's justice for allowing that to happen. The text continues: "Jesus, answering, said

unto them, Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay. But, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (vv. 2-3). Jesus was saying that they weren't any worse than the people He was talking to. The key issue was repentance. Unless they repented, they would die also. The Galilean Jews were examples. They received justice as an illustration of what would happen to all who don't repent. Jesus then gave another example of the same principle: "Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and killed them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay. But, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (vv. 4-5). History affirms God's goodness. Some He has appointed as examples to warn of sin's just consequence and make us grateful and repentant that we haven't received it.

2. The result

If you refuse to be led to repentance by God's goodness, and if you will not thank Him and come to Christ, then your hard and unconverted heart is piling up wrath. You may be avoiding God's judgment now, but in the day when the fullness of wrath is revealed at the Great White Throne, God's righteous judgment will break loose on you. Because God is merciful, people think their future is secure. Instead of being driven to repentance because God has been so kind to them as sinners, they are under the illusion that they have nothing to be concerned about. So people tread on His mercy only to one day experience the fullness of His wrath.

a) The state of the heart The Greek word translated "hardness" (*sklerot[ma]jes*) in Romans 2:5 gives us the English word sclerosis. It refers to the hardening of something, such as the arteries (arteriosclerosis). Hardening of the arteries may take you to the grave, but hardening of the heart will take you to hell. Paul also referred to the heart that's "impenitent," which means "non-repentant," "unconverted," or "unchanged." Ezekiel said that the Israelites had a stony heart (Ezek. 3:7; 36:26). Jesus also referred to people with hard hearts (Matt. 19:8; Mark 3:5; 6:52; 8:17; John 12:40). The writer of Hebrews urged his audience three times not to harden their hearts (Heb. 3:8, 15; 4:7). Those who become cold and indifferent store up wrath for themselves. b) The time of the judgment I believe that the "day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Rom. 2:5) refers to the Great White Throne. Revelation 20:11-15 tells us that the Lord will call together all the wicked dead. They will be "judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works" (v. 12) and will then be cast forever into the lake of fire with the devil and his angels.

CONCLUSION

You can tread on God's mercy now and receive fury in the future, or you can recognize His mercy for what it is, be grateful, and come to God with a repentant heart and turn to Christ. If God's goodness to you is not leading you to repentance, then every sin you commit is filling up a reservoir of God's patience that is held together by His mercy. Some day it will get too full. When the dam breaks you will be drowned in an eternal flood of your own sins. But you have an alternative. In the midst of that is an island of safety: the island Calvary, where the Savior waits for you come to Him.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What can be characterized as the worst sin (see p. 2)?
2. When we sin, what do we show contempt for (see p. 2)?
3. What do people despise about God (Rom. 2:4; see p. 2)?
4. Explain the depth of God's goodness (see p. 3).
5. What don't most people in the world understand about God's goodness (see p. 4)?
6. How patient was God with Israel (see p. 4)?
7. What is the design of God's goodness (see p. 5)?
8. What do many people today believe about God's judgment (see p. 5)?
9. How do people see themselves in relation to the goodness of God (see p. 6)?
10. What do some people accuse God of when something goes wrong in life (see p. 6)?

11. Describe how some people view God based on His actions in the Old Testament (see pp. 6-7).
12. With what must we compare God's mercy (see p. 8)?
13. What was true of all sin at the beginning (see p. 8)?
14. What happened to Adam and Eve when they ate the forbidden fruit? What is significant about that (see p. 9)?
15. What is significant about the fact that there were only some thirty capital offenses when the Mosaic law was instituted (see p. 9)?
16. What is God's purpose in giving us examples of people who received judgment (see p. 10)?
17. What is the point Jesus was making in Luke 13:2-5 (see p. 11)?
18. What are people doing when they refuse to be led to repentance by God's goodness (Rom. 2:5)?
19. How are those who reject God characterized (Rom. 2:5)? Explain (see p. 12).

Pondering the Principles

1. Psalm 107:8 says, "Oh, that men would praise the Lord for his goodness." Do that right now. Examine your life and identify the obvious places where you have seen God's goodness at work. Then think of the many different kinds of sins you have committed. Thank God for His goodness in not giving you what you deserve. Finally thank God for giving you out of His riches all the relationships you have. Recognize that all you have is the result of God's goodness.
2. Review the entire chapter. As you do, record the facts that would help you in a gospel presentation to those who question God's fairness in dealing with mankind. Next prepare an outline or small presentation of those truths. Ask God to direct you in your preparation. Ask Him to use your efforts in helping people to see the reality of God's goodness and how that leads to repentance from sin.

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