

## ***God's Righteous Judgment vs. Human Judgment***

Romans 2:1-11

September 17, 2017

*You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. <sup>2</sup> Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. <sup>3</sup> So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? <sup>4</sup> Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?*

*<sup>5</sup> But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. <sup>6</sup> God "will repay each person according to what they have done." <sup>7</sup> To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. <sup>8</sup> But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. <sup>9</sup> There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; <sup>10</sup> but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. <sup>11</sup> For God does not show favoritism.*

Romans 2:1-11 (NIV)

Once we get past Paul's introduction to his letter to the early Christian's in Rome, which is in the first 17 verses of chapter one, where Paul gives us a summary of the Gospel or the Good News of God, the beginning of his letter can be rather depressing. We need to remember that he is giving us a step by step progression the Good News of God, God's plan of salvation for humankind. And he begins by letting us know about our human condition without God's intervention. And he begins by talking about God's wrath against all humankind, that which Alex looked at last week at the end of chapter one. Without God's intervention we are all doomed to destruction.

*The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.*

Romans 1:18-20 (NIV)

At the end of Romans chapter one Paul is speaking about all mankind. "The wrath of God" is one of the attributes of God that we don't like to talk about. But, in many well-known ways throughout history God has expressed his **wrath** against sinful humankind: In the days of Noah, God destroyed all humankind in the Flood with the exception of eight people; in the days of Abraham, God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, with only Lot and his family escaping, for all the evil that was present in that part of the land; and God destroyed Pharaoh and his army of Egyptians in the Red Sea as they pursued the Israelites, as well as the young infant children of the Egyptians before the Israelites fled. Although we don't like to talk about it today, God's wrath is a real thing.

Even in the New Testament God's wrath is set against God's love. The Gospel of John, which speaks so well of God's love and grace, also speaks of His anger and wrath. The most quoted words in all the Bible, found in John 3:16, "*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life,*" is followed several verses later by these words of Jesus, "*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him*" (John 3:36 NIV).

But God's wrath is not necessarily a bad thing. It can also be a good thing. A potentially fatal disease, like cancer, has to be identified and recognized before ever seeking a cure. In the same way and for the same reason, the Bible reveals the bad news before the Good News. God's righteous judgment against sin is proclaimed before His gracious forgiveness of sin is offered. A person has no reason to seek salvation from sin if he or she does not know they are condemned by it.

With the one exception of Jesus Christ, every human being since the Fall of Adam & Eve in the Garden of Eden has been condemned, because when Adam & Eve fell God's divine sentence against all sinners was passed. That is what the end of Romans chapter one that we looked at last week was addressing.

Now this morning as we begin chapter two, Paul is writing mostly to the early Jewish Christians in Rome, but also all who would come to believe in Jesus:

*You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. <sup>2</sup> Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. <sup>3</sup> So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment?*

Romans 2:1-3 (NIV)

When Paul wrote, "you who practice the very same things," did he mean the exact same things? Well, in one sense yes, but in another sense no. Interestingly, one of the great downside and blindside of our sinful human nature is that the same sins that we judge people for are often the same sins that we struggle with. Perhaps maybe not always the exact same sin, but similar. Those who are quick to judge those who are in sexual sin often are in sexual sin themselves, but maybe not the exact same kind of sexual sin. Those who seem quite anxious to judge those who gossip about others, often gossip themselves. Those who judge others about being judgmental are often judgmental. That is one of the quirks about our human nature. You would think not, but it is. Maybe that's one of the ways God created us to help us to look at our own sin. If you want to discover what sin you might struggle with the most, think about what sins you are quick to judge others about. In that sense Paul does mean the same things.

But in another sense he does not mean the exact same things. Since God does not rate sin like we like to rate sin: this sin is more heinous than that, this one deserves more punishment than that one, all our sin is the same thing. In God's eyes, all sin, from the smallest to the greatest is an affront, a disrespect, an offense against His righteous character and holiness. And because of that, all sin, from the smallest to the greatest is punishable by death. That is the bad news that Paul starts with. It's the same bad news that the Bible starts with, once you get past the first two

chapters. It's the same bad news that Jesus started with. Jesus, He himself the Good News who came to earth, would not have had to come to earth and die on the cross if the bad news hadn't come first.

So does that mean that we Christians are not to judge others today? The answer from the Bible is yes! And it isn't just Paul who tells us that, Jesus tells us that:

<sup>37</sup> *“Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.”* <sup>38</sup> *Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you...”*

<sup>41</sup> *“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? <sup>42</sup> How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.”*  
Luke 6:37-42

The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines

Judgment – <sup>1</sup> The act or process of forming an opinion or making a decision after careful thought; the act of judging something or someone; <sup>2</sup> a formal utterance of an authoritative opinion; <sup>3</sup> a divine sentence or decision; <sup>4</sup> the final judgment of human kind by God.

When it comes to us judging other human beings there are some problems with that definition: 1) very rarely is there “careful thought;” 2) when it comes to judging other human beings we are not in the position of authority, for only God knows people's hearts; and 3) since it is a divine sentence or decision, then it relies solely on God.

In the Bible there are several Hebrew and Greek words that we have translated into the word judgment:

O.T. (Hebrew) -

The most common (mispat) meaning is that which comes as a result of the law.

The second most common (leb) meaning is that which comes from within us. It was often the word used for humans when they lacked judgment. In Proverbs 10:21 it says that “fools die for lack of judgment.” Lack of judgment about ourselves.

N.T. (Greek) -

krisis or krisos, also where we get the word “crisis” today. Krisis or krisos is the concept of determining the correctness of a matter, to decide.

As humans we judge the correctness of matters every day, many times a day, over and over again. We judge the decisions we make and the decisions others make. But we are not called to judge people. Moses was called by God to judge matters – to settle disputes between the people of God, and eventually he would appoint others to do the same, but he was never called to judge people. Moses himself says in Deuteronomy 1:17, “judgment belongs to God.”

It is vitally important that we understand the difference between God's righteous judgment and human judgment. In our passage this morning Paul is writing about our judgment of other human beings. What Paul is saying is that the act of judging another human being places us under judgment by God. The moment I judge another person, it places upon me the same obligation I am imposing on the other. And it doesn't have to be the same sin. Since all sin is punishable by death, it applies to all sin. The act of judging another human being renders the one who judges inexcusable for his or her own sins.

God's law is not many laws, like these small ones over here and the big ones over here, or even just the Ten Commandments, there is one law and one God. So sin cannot be dealt with in terms of guilt for this sin or that sin. Any and all sin stands as a transgression against the nature of God which is described in His law, so any sin renders one condemned by his or her judgment of others.

You see the Jews thought that they were set apart from God's judgment. Yes, they had the law, but they were God's chosen ones. As long as they did their best to try and keep the law, especially those really heinous ones – like murder, adultery, homosexuality, idolatry – they were saved. It was all the others, that which was represented by “the Gentiles,” and all their sin, that would bring **them** under God's judgment.

The main message that Paul is trying to send here is that there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles. You see, sin is our great equalizer! Paul is saying that the principles of judgment, God's righteous judgment, are applicable to every single human being – both Jew and Gentile. The fact that some have the law in written form, and some do not, does not change the fact that all will be judged. Even more importantly for the Jews, the order of judgment is the same as the order of salvation. In Romans 1:16 he tells us that salvation is possible for everyone who believes. That is everyone who believes in the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Gospel of God, **first** for the Jew, then for the Gentile. Jesus himself said that He came first for the Jews. Then Paul tells us in verse 9 of chapter 2 that judgment also comes first to the Jews and then the Gentiles. Those who have been chosen and set-apart by God are under the same judgment by God, and under the same requirement for salvation as all the others – repentance of their own sins and faith/belief in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord.

Anytime we judge others, we *show contempt for the riches of God's kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance*, as well as all others. God's great mercy and love is not meant to make us feel that we are better than any other person, or that we can continue to sin and get away with it; they are meant to break our hearts so that we will seek to never sin again (though we know we will).

What Paul was saying was quite world changing, especially for the Jews. What he was saying is that there is no favored nation status when it comes to judgment and salvation. As William Barclay wrote in his commentary on *The Letter to the Romans*, “There may be nations which are picked for a special task and for a special responsibility, but none which are picked for special privilege and special consideration.”

That applies to Israel today, as well as America, and/or any other country. It also applies to those who grow up in a Christian church and are still part of a Christian church. We can often do the same things that the Jewish Christians did at the beginning of the early church. Salvation comes only through Jesus Christ, the acknowledgment of our own sinfulness, repentance – agreeing to try and turn from that sinfulness, and by faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord.

The moment that we judge others for their sinfulness, we put our salvation in jeopardy. If there is one sin that might be the unpardonable sin, it just might be the judging of other human beings. How do I come up with that? Well, what was the one sin that Jesus said was unpardonable? Jesus says in Matthew 12:31-32 –

*“And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.”* Matthew 12:31 (NIV)

Blasphemy is defined as “a great disrespect shown to something holy.” Who is the Spirit? He and she is the third person of the Holy Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one who convicts us of our own sinfulness, causes us to acknowledge that sinfulness and to repent and to put our faith in Jesus. The Holy Spirit is the one who does the work inside of us and transforms us back into the people God originally created us to be.

When we judge people we blasphemy the Holy Spirit by putting people outside of the ability for the same Holy Spirit that worked in our life, to work in the life of others, even those guilty of the most heinous of offenses. I say that this morning acknowledging and confessing to you that judging others might just be one of the sins that I personally struggle with the most.

*<sup>1</sup> Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. <sup>2</sup> Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. <sup>3</sup> The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst <sup>4</sup> they said to him, “Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. <sup>5</sup> Now in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?” <sup>6</sup> This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. <sup>7</sup> And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.” <sup>8</sup> And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. <sup>9</sup> But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. <sup>10</sup> Jesus stood up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” <sup>11</sup> She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.”*

John 8:1-8 (ESV)

Whenever we judge others not only do we blasphemy the Holy Spirit we *show contempt on God’s riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience and mercy towards us.*

Henri Nouwen was one of the most respected Christian writers and teachers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He had a very unique ability to be able to speak to our human condition which transcends all our ethnicity, race, sex, Christian denomination, and on and on. This week as I was preparing my message I came across this very profound quote of his:

“Here we have come back to the compassion that must be formed in one’s heart, a compassion that comes out of a deep experience of solidarity in which one recognizes that the evil, sin and violence which one sees in the world and in the other, are deeply rooted in one’s own heart. Only when you want to confess this and want to rely on the most merciful God who can bring good out of evil are you in a position to receive forgiveness and also to give it to others.”