



SCRIPTURE STUDIES: ROMANS 2:1-5

Brandon Sutton, Associate Pastor of The Journey Church in Lebanon, TN

Romans 2:1-5 (ESV) -- Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. Do you suppose, O man - you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself - that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

Jonathan Edwards is widely considered to be one of America's greatest theologians, and his sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, is believed to be the most famous sermon in American history.

What's interesting about that sermon is that Edwards preached it more than once and in different locations. On one occasion, he preached the sermon, and no one responded. But then at a different time, he preached the exact same message and people fell on their faces in repentance and humility, begging for the mercy of God. Only the Spirit of God brings repentance, not the preacher.

If you have never read that sermon, I recommend that you do. It's powerful. Here are some quotes from sermon.

- "The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked; his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else,

but to be cast into the fire ...you are ten thousand times so abominable in his eyes, as the most hateful and venomous serpent is in ours.”

- “There is laid in the very nature of carnal men a foundation for the torments of hell. ” “Therefore, let anyone who does not now know Christ awake and fly from the wrath to come.
- The wrath of Almighty God is now undoubtedly hanging over a great part of this congregation. Let everyone fly out of Sodom!! Run for your lives! Don’t look back! Escape to the mountain, lest you be consumed!”

Can you imagine sitting under such preaching? At one moment, a lady remarked, “Mr. Edward, is there no mercy with God?” He said, that’s next week’s message. You will have to wait.

I imagine the people in Rome reading Paul’s letter might have been thinking the same thing. Paul! Where’s the mercy? We will get there, but for now, we must press in the universal condemnation of man so that once we get to throne of grace, we see our need for the gospel first.

Scriptural Context

- **Romans 1:18-32.** Paul indicted the Gentiles for their rejection of God, idolatry, sexual immorality, and overall sinfulness.
- **Romans 2:1-3:20.** Paul will now bring condemnation on the Jews who, though they have the law and the covenants and promises, are not saved because of these advantages. They need the righteousness of Christ.
- **Paul’s format.** Paul started with the condemnation of the Gentiles (1:18-32). The Jews would have agreed with his doctrine, but he quickly moved to the Jews. Some think this may have been the format Paul used in the synagogues; perhaps Romans is an adapted sermon. This is what makes 1:18-3:20 Paul’s universal condemnation of man. It sets up the need for the gospel of grace and righteousness of Christ through faith.
- **Romans 2:1-16 Overview.** Paul informs the Jews that they too are under the wrath of God. The very sins they condemn the Gentiles for, they themselves are guilty of too (1-5). Their covenantal relationship with God will not spare them the wrath of God unless they repent because God is an impartial Judge (6-11). Possessing the law is not what saves. Doing the law is what matters. The doers of the law will be rewarded. Law breakers will be condemned. (12-16).

- **Romans 2:1-5.** This is a Pauline diatribe directed at “O man”, a representative of those responsible, a moralist who passes judgment on immoral people. The Jews are self-condemned because they practice the same sins that they condemn the Gentiles for (V.1). Paul reminds the Jews that God is a righteous and impartial Judge (V.2), and they will not escape His judgement lest they repent (V.3-5).
- **Why is Paul doing this?** Is his aim to condemn the unsaved Jews in the congregation? Partly, but remember he is primarily preaching to saved Jews and Gentiles. He wants them to understand the gospel. This is not detached doctrine that’s only applicable to unsaved Jews. It helps the everyday believer understand God and his ways.

This passage is about the judgment of God. I want to share with you five truths about God’s judgment.

Point #1-God’s Judgment Falls on Hypocrites

Romans 2:1 (ESV) -- Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things.

- **Explanation.** God’s wrath falls on those who reject Him (1:18-32), therefore, you have no excuse for judging others, because in doing so you condemn yourself since you practice the very same things. In other words, the Jews were hypocrites. They condemned Gentiles for the very sins they themselves practiced. In doing so, they were condemning themselves since they performed the same sin.
- **Paul is not condemning judging the sins of others.** Many liberal Christians and secularists love that Paul is saying that we shouldn’t judge others. Anytime a Christian calls out societal sins, they are quick to jump in and say, “*Jesus said not to judge, and look Paul says the same thing—don’t judge!*” But that’s not what Paul is saying. Paul expects everyone to agree with his judgments in chapter 1. Paul says, you have no excuse to judge others “**for**” (meaning, because) you practice the same sins. It’s not wrong to call sin what it is. The Bible condones that. What the Bible condemns is when believers condemn people for the very sin they are committing. In other words, the Bible condemns hypocrisy.

- **Biblical Support.** Jesus said in Matthew 7:1-5, "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye." This is exactly what Paul is saying to the upright and religious people in the congregation. Be careful before you pass judgment on another person. In doing so, you're pronouncing judgment on yourself.
- **Examples of hypocrisy.** We're good at passing judgment on others. We condemn others for the same sins we commit or have committed before. We see people living together and forget we too were once sexually immoral. We don
- **Application:**
 - **Live righteously.** We must live noble lives and examine ourselves daily. We cannot be hypocrites.
 - **Make sound judgments.** This doesn't mean we can't judge justly. Paul is not condemned for his judgments, but we need to be sure that it is God's judgment we pass on people and not our own.
 - **More truth, more accountability.** The more truth you know, the more accountable you are to it. The reason Paul condemns the Jews in this passage is because they know God's truth. They show that by their ability to condemn others. They obviously have knowledge of God's law and what He expects of us. Therefore, their accountability before God is heightened. The more you know, the more responsible you are before the Lord.
 - **It's easy to be blind to our own sin.** The Jews in this text clearly did not see their hypocrisy. Neither do we in most cases. We must examine ourselves (Matthew 7:1-3).
 - **Christianity is not nullified by its hypocrites.** "Christianity does not stand or fall on the way Christians have acted throughout history or are acting today. Christianity stands or falls on the person of Jesus, and Jesus was not a hypocrite. He lived consistently with what He taught, and at the end of His life He challenged those who had lived with Him night and day, for over three years, to point out any hypocrisy in Him. His disciples were silent, because there was none. Since Christianity depends on Jesus, it is incorrect to try to invalidate the Christian faith by pointing to horrible things done in the name of Christianity." Josh McDowell and Don

Stewart, *Answers to Tough Questions Skeptics Ask About the Christian Faith* (Here's Life Publishers, 1980), 128.

Point #2-God's Judgment is Righteous

Romans 2:2 (ESV) -- We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things.

- **Explanation.** The "we" in this verse refers to Paul, his fellow Christians, and Jews who have similar knowledge. They know God's judgment will justly come upon those practice such things—that is, hypocrisy and the sins of 1:18-32.
- **What sins were the Jews guilty of?** Most Jews were not guilty of rejecting God, sexuality immorality or homosexuality (1:18-26). Most likely, they were guilty of more internal sins (v.29-32). This is what Jesus often condemn the Pharisees for. They appeared righteous on the outside, beautiful like a whitewashed tomb, but inwardly they were full of dead men's bones. They had outward religion, but their hearts were full of hypocrisy and corruption.
- **Application.** Let us be careful that our walk with Jesus doesn't merely become formalistic and about outward appearances. We must constantly attend to the matters of the heart.
- **The righteous judgment of God.** *"The judgment of God right falls."* God is a righteous judge (Ps. 9:4, 8, 96:13, Isa. 45:19). Only God can judge me" isn't good news.
- **JM Quote.** "There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:13). Every sin that every individual has ever committed flashes on a life-sized screen before God, as it were, with no detail missing from His view." MacArthur, John F.. Romans 1-8 MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Macarthur New Testament Commentary Serie) . Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

Point #3-God's Judgment is Inescapable

Romans 2:3 (ESV) -- Do you suppose, O man - you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself - that you will escape the judgment of God?

- **Explanation.** Paul asks a rhetorical question. The answer is no. The Jews who condemn the Gentiles for the very sins they themselves commit will not escape

the judgement of God. If we can't escape our own judgment, how much more will not escape the holy judgment of God?

- **Man's great desire.** The great desire of every man is to escape the judgment of God. The 20th century comedian and actor, WC Fields, was not a religious man. He actually stated that he hated Christmas. But when he was laying on his death bed, a friend came in and found him reading the Bible. His friend said, what are you doing? Fields said, I am looking for loopholes. Man desperately wants to avoid the judgment of God. That's the secret hope of every unbeliever.
- **Edwards Quote.** "Almost every natural man that hears of hell, flatters himself that he shall escape it; he depends upon himself for his own security; he flatters himself in what he has done, in what he is now doing, or what he intends to do."
- **Joe Gwinn.** I remember talking to an atheist friend of mine. I asked, what if when you die, there is a God who will judge you? He said, if He is just, He will see that I have tried to live my life to enhance the lives of others (whatever that means), and if He isn't, I don't want his heaven anyways.
- **The gospel.** Let us not be ashamed to continually point people to the gospel. May we always push people to the cross of Christ. Urge them to flee to the Savior. In the OT, God ordered that Israel create cities of refuge in the case of involuntary manslaughter. He knew that the victim's family would pursue the guilty party and exact revenge. But these cities refuge were safe zones from the wrath of men. Christ is our city of refuge. Only within His gates will we be spared from the wrath of God, because man shall not escape God's judgment, otherwise.

Point #4-God's Judgment is Delayed

Romans 2:4 (ESV) -- or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

- **Explanation.** Man does not fear the judgment of God. Why? Because God is slow to judgment. His judgment is delayed in most cases (Uzzah). He is slow to judgment because He is giving man time to repent. God is being kind and patient. But man misunderstands God's patience for the notion that God won't pass judgment at all. He doesn't realize God's kindness is meant to lead to repentance, not the idea that He won't judge. Therefore, man presumes on the riches of God's kindness and forbearance and patience. He thinks light of God's mercy.

- **Forbearance and Patience.** “Forbearance comes from *anochē*, which means “to hold back,” as of judgment. It was sometimes used to designate a truce, which involves cessation of hostilities between warring parties. God’s forbearance with mankind is a kind of temporary divine truce He has graciously proclaimed. Patience translates *makrothumia*, which was sometimes used of a powerful ruler who voluntarily withheld vengeance on an enemy or punishment of a criminal.” (MacArthur, John F.. Romans 1-8 MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Macarthur New Testament Commentary Serie) . Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition)
- **JM Quote.** Kindness refers to the benefits God gives, forbearance refers to the judgment He withholds, and patience to the duration of both.
- **The delayed judgment of God.** For God, delayed judgment is not injustice. It is mercy. No one ever gets injustice with God. You either get justice or mercy. It is His Kindness and patience. God is giving man time to repent—to turn away from sin and back to God.
- **Paul Washer.** Paul stood before a crowd and said, “It’s as if God is holding out one hand and bidding man to come and with the other hand, God is holding back His wrath, but one day both hands will be dropped.” Through Christ, God invites sinners to repent and be saved. For a season, God is holding back the full power of His judgment, but one day, the hand of invitation will no longer be extended and gates containing the wrath of God will be opened.
- **Biblical examples of God’s delayed Judgment.** We should not mistake God’s patience for the notion that He won’t judge. It took Noah many decades to build the ark. During that time, Noah was a preacher of righteousness; presumably warning the people that flood was coming. The Ark was big enough for many to get on, but eventually God’s patience ended, judgment came and all but a few died. The Lord told Abraham that his descendants would one day take the land of Promise, but not until the iniquity of the Amorites was complete. It would be another 400 plus years before Joshua entered the Promised Land and carried out God’s judgment. How many centuries did God patiently endure Israel’s covenant transgressions before He sent in the Assyrians into Northern Israel and then the Babylonians into Judah? How many decades did He give Israel to repent after murdering the Messiah before He destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD? God’s patience is delayed. How much longer will the Lord give the USA? How many decades has our nation been sinking the sands of immorality? How much more time will God give us before it’s too late.
- **People don’t understand how merciful God is.** Some people think God doesn’t treat people fairly. “Why do bad things happen to good people?” “Rather than asking why God allows bad things to happen to good people, we should ask

why He allows good things to happen to bad people. We could ask why He does not strike down many other people for their sins, including Christians, as He did with Korah, Uzzah, Ananias and Sapphira

- **Matthew Henry.** "There is in every willful sin a contempt for the goodness of God." Every intentional sin thinks lightly of the mercy of God.
- **Great illustration.** Like 13:1-5
- **God's mercy is immediate.** The good news is that though God's judgment is delayed, His mercy comes immediately to those who repent.

Point #5-God's Judgment is Building Up

Romans 2:5 (ESV) -- But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

- **Explanation.** The Jews failed to obey God because of their hard and unrepentant hearts. Therefore, they are storing up the judgment of God against themselves. On the Day of Judgement, God's wrath will be revealed.
- **Unconverted Jews.** Paul is not speaking to the Jewish Christian in the church at Rome. He is speaking about unconverted Jews who reject Jesus. The law cannot change their hearts. Therefore, they cannot keep the law or repent of sin since those are actions only performed by the power of the Spirit (V.29).
- **Storing up wrath.** Instead of storing up treasures in Heaven, they are storing up God's wrath. Each man will receive a just measure of God's wrath. There will be levels of judgment based on what you have done (V.6). Jesus made this clear (Matt. 11).

Application

1. Judge yourself before you judge others.
2. Don't be afraid to call sin, sin.
3. A transformed life is evidence of salvation.
4. Every sin will be punished.
5. The Day of the Lord is coming.
6. Praise God for His mercy.