

Judgment

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[0 : 0 0] Well, as I said, today we are going to be looking at this large section of the letter to the Romans that we read together. We've been studying this letter and we've been working our way through the early chapters to see what Paul is teaching us. From chapter 2 verse 1 all the way through to chapter 3 verse 20, Paul sets out a long detailed argument which we're going to look at today but we can read again at verse 9 and 10 of chapter 3 because in many ways this is the conclusion of his argument. He says, What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin as it is written, none is righteous. No, not one. As we were reading, as I said at the start of our reading, at the end of chapter 1 Paul is describing the devastating effect that sin has had on the world. He said that people have suppressed the truth. They've tried to deny the reality of the fact that God is creative and we have at His creation.

Because they've suppressed the truth, their thinking has become futile. People have turned to idolatry. Instead of worshiping the Creator, we start worshiping the creature. As a result, God gave people up to follow their impure lusts. Futile thinking led to impure desires and that in turn has led to shameful actions which were not only practiced, they are also approved of. And as we saw a fourth letter go, Paul is describing the world of today. It's incredibly relevant to the situation that we are in. And the key point through it all is that God is righteous. But we, the human race, have chosen the path of unrighteousness. Therefore, instead of enjoying God's favour, we have provoked His holy wrath. A righteous God and an unrighteous people are antithetical. They're opposites. They're incompatible. And the world has got itself into a desperate state. Paul is summarising at the end of chapter 1 the devastating effect of sin and how it separated us from our Creator. We are now under His wrath. Then in chapter 2 and chapter 3, Paul takes us step by step into a deeper analysis of the situation. And this is one of these chapters where you can read through chapter 2 and the first half of chapter 3 and you can think, oh, I don't really understand this.

It's very easy to get lost. It's easy to get confused because there's a lot of things being said here. And if you feel like that, don't worry because hopefully today we can look at this together and we can understand the flow of Paul's argument a bit better.

And in order to do that, it's actually very, very helpful to try and identify the questions that Paul is answering in chapter 2 and chapter 3 because in many ways he is answering key questions regarding the state of the world. As we said, at the end of chapter 1, the world is in a desperate state. That raises the question, how should we respond to the situation in the world? That's the question that Paul is answering at the start of chapter 2. How should we respond? You look at the world, we can see that today's the same, it's still a mess.

How do we respond? Well, Paul raises a vital point. When we observe the state of the world as we do at the end of Romans chapter 1 or as we look at the news today, we can very easily find ourselves saying, what an awful state things that in. In other words, we judge the world, don't we? We look at what's going on and we think that's a mess. And of course, that's true. We judge the world. But in verses 1 to 5, Paul gives us a very, very sharp warning.

[4 : 42] He says, you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges, for in passing judgment on one another, you condemn yourself because you, the judge, practice the very same things.

Paul is saying, you who judge the world, you are going to be judged yourself. And if you like, Paul is setting before us two categories. He's saying, are you really the judge or are you going to be judged? And of course, the answer is that we're going to be judged. And here Paul is yet again making us think about our world view. Very often, our world view is used to judge others, isn't it? We're looking out over the world, we're viewing the world and we judge the world. And depending on what our world view is, we judge other people.

For example, somebody with a purely scientific world view, a purely naturalistic world view, might judge people who care about art or philosophy or theology because they might think that they're just wasting their time. Somebody with a skeptical world view might judge all people who hold beliefs and say, these people are crazy. Why are they holding onto these beliefs that are just fairy tales? More specifically, somebody who's got a world view that's maybe based on the value of the European Union, might use that world view to judge everybody who voted for Brexit. We use our world view to judge others, don't we? It can even apply in a trivial way where somebody who loves Celtic automatically judges anyone who supports Rangers. Our world view is often used to judge others and most of the time, we think that we are the ones who know best. However, a true biblical world view is not so much concerned about being judged over others. A biblical world view is primarily concerned with the fact that we are going to be judged. And Paul is reminding us about the absolute certainty of judgment. He's saying, don't think about how you can judge others. Think about the fact that you're going to be judged yourself. That's a key biblical principle. We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. And the vital question is this, does the reality of God's judgment have any effect on the way you live your life? And for many people, the answer to that question is no. And I look at myself and I realise that I don't recognise this nearly enough either. And part of the reason for that is because judgment hasn't yet happened. Judgment is a future event. But we must never ever forget that the fact that God's judgment has not yet come does not mean that it isn't coming. And that's two of lots of things. My tax bill has not come yet. Every year ministers have to fill out a self assessment. You get a tax bill in January. My tax bill hasn't come yet, but it's coming. And if that's true of HMRC, it is certainly true of God. But we use the delay in God's judgment as an opportunity to judge others, don't we? We look at other people, we judge them, we think, look at these people, look at what they're doing, look at that nation, look at what they're doing, look at that church, look at what they're doing.

We use God's forbearance as an opportunity to judge. But as Paul reminds us in verse 4, the kindness and forbearance and patience of God is not an opportunity for us to judge, it's an opportunity to repent. God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance.

So the biblical worldview is this, God is judge. We will be judged. And yet I ask myself two questions. How often do I judge other people? The answer is very often. How often do I think about the fact that I'm going to be judged? The answer is not very often.

[9 : 57] And I realize that my worldview, my mindset, my understanding is nowhere near as biblical as it should be. And here Paul is doing something that we see again and again and again in the Bible. In the Bible, repeatedly you see that when the sins of other people are highlighted, as they are here in the end of chapter one, when the sins of other people are highlighted, the Bible immediately says, watch yourself. Watch yourself. And that's why we must be so careful to control our instinct to judge others. And it's an instinct, it's a temptation.

We're so prone to judge others, so quick to judge others. And all the time God is saying, forget about other people. What about you? We must watch our own hearts and never forget that we face certain judgment ourselves. So that's the first question that Paul's answering. He's described the state of the world in chapter one. The question is posed, well, how do we respond to that? Paul says, stop judging others and realize that you yourself are going to be judged. But that raises the next question immediately. How does God's judgment work? If we're all going to be judged, how does God's judgment work? The answer to verse six, he will render to each one according to his works. Now you read that and you think, are you sure? Paul, are you sure that that's right? Surely salvation is not about works?

Surely the gospel isn't be good and you'll be saved? Is verse six wrong? Should we understand it differently? Verse six is not wrong at all. Verse six is absolutely right. The Bible means what it says, we will all be judged according to our works. That makes perfect sense. God is our creator. He has created us in his image. He has created us to do good just like he does and judgment will be based on whether or not we have. Paul highlights the same thing in chapter 14. He says, why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God for it is written, as I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me and every tongue shall confess to God so then each of us will give an account of himself to God. Every one of us, each of us, Paul is talking about himself. He's talking about me. He's talking about you. God will judge us according to what we've done. Then Paul explains a little bit more about what he means. He tells us two key things. First of all, he tells us the principle of judgment as verse 7 to 11. Basically, he says, those who do evil will provoke God's wrath.

Those who do good will be given eternal life. If you do good, you'll receive life. If you do evil, you'll receive wrath. Paul is splitting us into two categories and that was this principle that was set out for Adam and Eve. If they obeyed, they had life. If they disobeyed, they would surely die. That principle remained true. Jesus himself said it. A lawyer came to him and says, what should I do to inherit eternal life? He says, what's written in the law? The lawyer summarises it and Jesus says, you've answered correctly. Do this and you will live. Now what's going on here? Well here Paul is showing that God is absolutely fair. He's absolutely fair. As verse 11 says, God shows no partiality. God never condemns a good person, ever. He never shows unfair favouritism. He never shows inconsistent judgment.

God cannot be unjust. He cannot be unfair. He never ever will be. Always remember, God can never be bad, ever. His judgment is always absolutely impartial. It's always totally fair. He will only ever do what is right. That is the principle of God's judgment. He will only ever judge in a fair and right way. And you can have absolute confidence in God that he will always be a fair judge. But how do we know what's right? If God's always going to be doing what's right, how do we know what is right? That's the second thing that Paul explains. He highlights the principle of judgment, then he highlights the standard of judgment. That's in verse 12 to 16. I won't read through it all. He says, all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, but all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. The principle of judgment is that the good live the evil perish. How do we know what is good? What is the standard of judgment? The answer is the law. You look at that passage, these verses, law, law, law, law, law, law, law, law, law. The moral code summed up by the Ten Commandments is the standard of judgment with which we will be judged. And that makes perfect sense. The same is absolutely true in our nation.

[16:16] If you had to go out and appear at the sheriff's court and start on your way tomorrow for whatever reason, the standard of judgment would be the law. It's always the standard of judgment.

And in talking about the law, Paul again separates us into two categories. There's those who are without the law and there's those who are under the law. And again, Paul is highlighting the fact that God is totally feared. God will not use the law against somebody who never had it. But as Paul explains here, even Gentiles still have the law because look what he says.

When the Gentiles who do not have the law, as in the law written down by the Jews have, by nature do what the law requires. They are a law to themselves. Even though they do not have the law written in the Old Testament like the Jews do, they show that the work of the law is written on their hearts while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them. Paul is saying that even those Gentiles who do not have God's law written down in front of them still have an awareness of God's law in their conscience and in their heart. Therefore, they are also under the law that they know is in their hearts. And we know from experience that that's true. Stealing is stealing. And no matter where you go in the world, everybody is aware that that is wrong. God's law is written on their consciences. And Paul's point is that the Jews who have the law written down in the Scriptures and the Gentiles who have the law written on their hearts and an awareness of their principles and their conscience, they are all under the law. And that law will either accuse them or excuse them depending on what they've done.

So Paul is saying this. He's saying we will be judged according to our works. He says God is utterly impartial and totally fair. There's a principle of judgment that he operates by under which are two theoretical options. Do good and you will live. Do evil, you'll be condemned. The standard of the law that determines that, the standard of judgment which determines which category you are in is the law. And again, there's two theoretical options. You're either without the law, in which case you are separated from its implications, or you are under the law, in which case you are accountable to it. But the reality is, only one is under the law, to one degree or another. And under that law, the obedient will be excused, the disobedient will be accused. And then Paul makes a vital point in terms of how this law functions. Because he says that in terms of scrutinizing our works, God sees everything. That's why when Paul says that God is going to judge the secrets of men by Christ Jesus. This is teaching us that not only is God's judgment totally impartial, it is also completely informed. Sometimes judgments are made in society where nobody really knows the whole story. That's never the case with God. His judgment is totally informed. He sees everything about us. He sees the deepest secrets of our hearts. He sees everything. And God's law requires perfection because he is righteous. God's standards are perfect and we thank God that they are. And on the day of judgment we will be asked, what have you done? Have you kept my law? And if anybody can say that they are impeccable, then they'll never be condemned. But does such a person exist? How does God's judgment work? He will judge, he will impartially judge our works according to his law. That immediately raises our third question. How therefore should we respond to this law? And Paul again presents us with two options. Option number one is to rely on the law. That's what Paul describes in verses 17 to 29 of chapter 2 and in particular he's referring to the Jews. Paul is saying to the Jews, if you rely on the law and if you boast in the law and if you are confident that you're doing everything right, are you sure that you can rely on yourself to be perfectly obedient? That was the big problem with the Jews. They said, we've got the law, we're keeping the law, we're circumcised, we're doing everything right. And Paul says, are you sure? He says, it's not just about what you're doing on the outside. What about inwardly?

And his point is that these Jews who boast in the law are breaking it. The law boasters are actually law breakers. And what Paul is basically describing is legalism. And people often think that they can earn and achieve eternal life because of their own obedience.

[22 : 32] It was through in Paul's day, it's still through in our own day. We can do stuff to make ourselves good enough for God. And more often than not, that's based on an outward appearance in front of other people. We want to put on a good show so that other people will see that we're coming to church or we're speaking in the right way or we can say this or know this or do this or do that. People put on a show of piety and righteousness and we think that we could do good things. We are not as bad as other people. We are good enough for God.

And of course, if we were perfect, then we would have nothing to fear. But nobody is.

Paul is saying that the legalist needs to achieve perfection. And yet the one who says, don't do this and don't do that is all too often guilty of the very same things himself.

Relying on the law is theoretically possible, but it will never work because we can't do it. The other option is to protest against God's law. That's what Paul describes in chapter three verses 128. And it's the opposite of legalism, anti-nominism. That's two really important words to know. Legalism is the belief that you can keep God's law and work your way up to be good enough for him. Anti-nominism is the complete opposite that is against the law. Anti-nominomous is the Greek word for law. So against the law. You're saying, I'm protesting against this law. I don't need to keep this law. I don't need to think this law. This law is irrelevant to me. I don't need to have any concern for the law. And people protest against God's law. And Paul highlights the kind of protests that people might have in the first part of chapter three. First he addresses the person who says, well, what's the point of having God's law? If you can't keep it, what's the point in having it? Paul says having God's law is amazing. It's the oracles of God. The Jews had God's revelation to them. And that's an amazing, amazing privilege. God is revealing himself to them because he wants a relationship with them. But then Paul says, what about the fact that people disobey it? Does that not wreck God's plan? Does that not spoil God's order?

Paul says no. He says, even if everybody in the whole world rebels against God, God is still the one who is right. The truth is always the truth. And Paul says, well, what about the fact that if our sin highlights how good God is, surely he can't punish us. But Paul says, no, God is a righteous and fair judge. If he does not punish sin, he's an incompetent judge. Paul is saying God is a righteous judge. Somebody else says, what if my lying abounds to God's glory? Why not do evil so that God can do good and put it right? And that's the heart of anti-anomianism. It says, doesn't matter what I do because God will sort it.

[25 : 54] God will do it. God will forgive me. It's his job. Paul is saying, if we make an excuse for sin, all we are doing is justifying our own condemnation. So Paul is saying, we can't rely on the law. Legalism is hopeless. And he's saying, neither can we protest against the law because anti-nomianism is just self-condemning. And here we come to the whole purpose of Paul's argument. He is surveying the whole world. He is examining us in more and more and more detail and he is leading us to the inevitable conclusion, no one, no one is righteous, no one. Now there's a lot in that. And so I'm going to just recap it. So I hope that we're all seeing how Paul's argument is going. Let's just summarise Paul's argument. Remember we said throughout the whole of this Paul keeps dividing people into two categories, keeps making divisions into two categories. And we can summarise these on the slide. So his first question is this. Are you A, the judge or B, going to be judged? The answer is B. He says, okay, if you're going to be judged, have you always done good or not always done good? The answer is B. We haven't always done good at every single second of every day of our lives. Okay, so we've done things that are wrong. Therefore, are you without the law and therefore excused? Did you have no idea that that was wrong? Or did you have an awareness of sin and were you therefore under the law and accountable? Again, the answer is B. Okay, if you're accountable to the law, are you going to boast and rely on your obedience? Or are you going to have to acknowledge the fact that you're guilty of disobeying the law? The answer again is B. And so ultimately, are you excused or are you condemned? And the answer again is B. In all of these distinctions, everyone, either

Jew or Gentile, is falling into the same category. Because although the answer A, the category A answers are theoretically possible, in reality, no human being falls into any of these categories.

We are all going to be judged. None of us are judged. We are all those who do things that are wrong. We all do evil because none of us are perfectly good at every second of our lives. We are all under the law because no one is fully apart from the law because even if we don't have it written down, it's still written on our hearts. We are all guilty of breaking it. None of us can boast in our obedience and come and say to God that we're fine. And we are all condemned by it. Nobody can be excused because God is an impartial, consistent, fair judge. And Paul is putting together this absolutely watertight argument and his conclusion is devastating for everyone. For Jew and for Gentile. That's what he says.

What then? That's the conclusion. What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. And we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin. As it is written, none is righteous. No, not one. No one understands. No one seeks for God. All have turned aside. Together they've become worthless. No one does good. Not even one.

Their throat is an open grave. They use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. Their paths are ruin and misery. And the way of peace they have not known. How true is all of that of the world? People deceive with their tongues. People are quick to shed blood. Even in 2017, there's probably more blood shed today, or certainly just as much blood shed today as there has been in the years gone by. People's paths are full of ruin and misery. There's no fear of God before their eyes. And as a result, what can we say to God? The answer is nothing. Because whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law. That's all of us. So that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. And here's when Paul tells us what the law really does. For by works of the law, no human being will be justified. So what does the law do? This is what the law really does. Since through the law comes knowledge of sin. That's what the law ultimately does. It shows us our sin. And Paul's argument is devastating. It's devastating for the world.

[31 : 19] It's devastating for us. Because if we go through all those categories that Paul sets out, we will only come to the same conclusion that no one is righteous. And that includes me. And that includes you. And this is the desperate reality that sin has caused. And it's such a powerful reminder that sin is not a small thing. Sin is not like a little child disobeying and being a bit cheeky. Sin is not just this replay thing that we kind of dabble in, because it's actually quite nice if we do it, but it's not that serious.

Sin is the most destructive and hideous reality that the world has ever known. It is the worst diagnosis that anyone could ever get. It's the worst diagnosis that we could ever, ever get. And look at what Paul's done. He's taken us from chapter two, verse one, where we're all looking at the world, looking down our noses, judging other people, thinking, look at how bad they are. And he has shown us that we ourselves are just as guilty. We are accountable.

We are speechless. And in all of that, God is simply showing us that he is righteous.

Because if God's standards are perfect, that's what righteousness means. If God's standards are perfect, nothing else will do. And he is utterly fair and utterly consistent as judge.

And Paul has basically condemned every human being. So what happens next? Well, when Paul reaches this devastating conclusion that implicates the whole of humanity, what's the very next word that comes? But, but now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law. Although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe, for there is no distinction for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Now that, that is why the gospel is such good news.

[34 : 19] That is why the gospel is so amazing because the whole world stands guilty and condemned and accountable and speechless before God. But God says, hang on. I'm not leaving you like that. God says, but now there is another way in which my righteousness is going to be revealed, not through the fair consistent condemnation of the law, but through the gospel, through the fact that in Jesus Christ, I am providing a way of salvation for people who are utterly helpless and the whole gospel hangs on that word, but the law condemns us, but God, but God is showing us a better way because the law is not the only way in which the righteousness of God is revealed. The righteousness of God has now been revealed through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul is saying that if we put our faith in Jesus, those who are not righteous can be righteous. Isn't that what he said? He's just come to the conclusion no one is righteous, but yet he's saying, but you can be righteous and you say how? And he says there by his grace as a gift. Now you think about that. Think about the devastating conclusion that Paul reached in verse 20 of chapter three, and then he says, oh, but by the way, you who can never earn righteousness, you who can never achieve righteousness, you who can never claim righteousness, God will give it to you. That's why the gospel is seriously good news. God wants to give it to you. And as we'll discover when we come to the next verses, he can give it to us because Jesus took out place and was judged for us. Let's pray. God, our Father, we realize that we don't have an adequate grasp of your righteousness.

And nor do we have an adequate grasp of the fact that we fall short of that. And we know, Lord, that if you were to mark our sin, none of us could stand. But how we thank you, Lord, for the gospel, that even though we are those who are not righteous, you in your amazing grace are willing to give us that righteousness and to give it freely. Help us to see what God and help us to see the greatness of that gift and help us all to accept it in Jesus' name.

Amen.