

Principles of Judgment

A Study on Romans 2:1-16

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Daniel Webster was once asked, “What is the greatest thought that has ever entered your mind?” He replied at once, “My responsibility to my Maker!” Like Webster, each person born into this world should understand that he is responsible to his Maker. Men must prepare now to meet their God because they most certainly will meet Him: “Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel” (Amos 4:12).

Romans 1:18–3:20 proves all men to be sinners who are guilty before a holy God. These chapters do not speak about salvation — the subject at hand is condemnation! Romans 2:1-16 deals specifically with the moral Jew, but applies directly to all men everywhere. Even the moral man is guilty before God. He is the respectable sinner or the do-gooder. He may not be guilty of gross unrighteousness as the pagan Gentiles described in the first chapter, but he is guilty of self-righteousness. Because he is proud of being better than other people, he criticizes others and becomes guilty of the sins of pride and criticism. In these verses Paul drives home the fact that judgment is coming upon these individuals. The fear of judgment can shake a self-righteous and self-sufficient person out of complacency about his relationship to God and Christ.

There are many wonderful, good, moral people in this world who do not know Christ as personal Lord and Saviour. They may be outwardly humble, but inwardly proud because they cannot bring themselves to think that they are sinners separated from God. No self-righteous person will be saved until he admits that he is a sinner. Why? Men cannot be saved (delivered) until they see that they have a need for the Saviour.

In this section Paul sets forth seven principles by which all men, even the moral, will be judged by God. In the preceding lesson we saw three of these principles:

According to Truth: God’s judgment will be in strict accordance with His holy nature. It will be according to the true facts of the case, completely free of prejudice.

According to God’s Goodness: God has blessed moral men in common grace — friends, health, children, money, etc. — and this should cause them to repent, acknowledging their sinful condition and turning to God through Christ. But they reject God’s goodness, so God will judge them by that goodness.

According to Accumulated Guilt: Men continue to harden their hearts toward God and to live only for themselves. Thus they are simply storing up guilt for the final judgment day. Men condemn themselves by their own rejection of truth.

JUDGMENT ACCORDING TO WORKS — Romans 2:6-8

In this section Paul contrasts knowing and doing. His point is that works evidence or demonstrate either the reception or rejection of truth. Does the moral man really do what he says? Paul maintains that deeds reveal the true attitude of the heart.

“Who will render to every man according to his deeds.” Every man will be judged according to his works, and those works will prove inadequate for salvation.

Some take this verse out of context and think it means that God will reward all men for their works. This is a judgment passage, not a blessing passage. Many people think God has a scale in which he weighs a person’s good and bad deeds, and that if the good outweigh the bad, the person will go to heaven. This simply is not the biblical picture. Good works cannot get a person to heaven:

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9).

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Tit. 3:5).

“But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6).

Men will ultimately be judged by even their good works. Works that are “good” in human terms are still not good enough to be meritorious for salvation. All those works will be insufficient to save:

“And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man

according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:11-15).

“To them who by patient continuance [perseverance] in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life.” Here Paul contrasts the works of the saved with those of the unsaved. He is not speaking of how a person is saved, but of the evidence or outward demonstration of an inward reality. Only the saved man is producing works acceptable to God, but even these are not able to save. The Christian will never be judged for his sins because Christ has paid that penalty, but he will be judged for his works. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10). These works can never bring salvation.

The unsaved man will be judged for his sins and his works. He will plead his works, but there will be no forgiveness for his sins.

The believer has immortality, glory and eternal life in Christ, but by exercising faith in his daily life he seeks the reality of these things he already possesses.

“But unto them that are contentious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath.” Those who do not obey the truth, that is, the light God has given them, stand under the wrath of God. God will judge according to the result of obedience or the lack of obedience to truth in a person’s life.

JUDGMENT ACCORDING TO IMPARTIALITY — Romans 2:9-11

“Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also the Gentile.” The wrath of God is coming upon all those who do evil. It is upon every soul; none will be free of this judgment. No person can plead innocent; all will know themselves to be guilty. This judgment will come first on the Jew and then on the Gentile. Why? Both have rejected God’s light, but the Jew had so much more light. Possibly judgment of the Jews will be greater!

“But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile.” These blessings are for those who give genuine evidence of inner salvation by their good works. Possibly the Jew who has responded to Christ will be rewarded before Gentiles who have received him.

“For there is no respect of persons with God.” God is holy and just, and shows no favoritism towards any man. His judgment is impartial! Background, education, position, or privilege will not alter God’s judgment on any man. Neither breeding nor ancestry will help. The notorious and the respectable will be judged without partiality. Men will not be able to influence or buy off God.

I remember reading the story of a traffic policeman who pulled a motorist over to the side of the road and asked for the driver’s license. As the officer read, he said, “This license says that you have to wear glasses while you are driving. Where are your glasses?”

The driver, who was obviously not wearing glasses, pointed to his eyes and said, “I have contacts.” The policeman said, “I don’t care *who* you know or what contacts you have, you are going to get a ticket!”

There are too many of us, it seems, who think that if we have contacts with the right people, we can buy off the judgment we deserve. This does not work with God. No one can influence him so that he will go easy on us. God is without partiality!

JUDGMENT ACCORDING TO OPPORTUNITY — Romans 2:12-15

One might agree that it is right to judge the immoral Gentile, but still ask if it is right to judge the moral Gentile who never heard of Christ. Both Jew and Gentile will be judged by the law they possess. The case can be stated like this: The Jew has the written revelation of the Old Testament including the Mosaic Law, and the Gentile has natural revelation including the law of his conscience. Both break the laws they have and show themselves to be sinners condemned by their own laws. Therefore, God will judge them because a holy God must judge sin.

“For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law.” The heathen who does not have the Mosaic Law will perish without that law. Note well, this verse says the heathen will perish!

“And as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law.” God will judge the Jew by the written Law of Moses.

“For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.” The doer of the law is hypothetical, for no one but Christ has ever kept the Mosaic Law perfectly.

“For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves.” The most pagan Gentile has a sense of right and wrong. He has a natural impulse or native instinct concerning many of the things written in the Mosaic Law — natural affections, respect for persons, care for others, murder, etc. — but he cannot live by this law of his conscience.

Every society, whether a pagan group in Africa or the Mafia in America, has its own moral code, but men break their own moral codes. Who has ever lived up to his own ideals? Who has never deliberately done wrong at some time? God will not judge men by some artificial standard, but by the very standard man himself accepts. He measures us by our own yardstick and we come up short every time!

“Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.” The law of conscience either accuses man of his wrong or else makes excuses for the wrong that is done. Either way it proves that all men are sinners!

JUDGMENT ACCORDING TO GOD’S OMNISCIENCE — Romans 2:16

“In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.” God’s omniscience will scrutinize every man’s life, and God alone knows the inner recesses of the heart: “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” (Heb. 4:13). God will judge us according to the secrets of our hearts that no one else in all the world knows. These are the secret things that we wouldn’t tell another soul about: our thought life, our secret sins! Samuel Johnson said, “Every man knows that of himself that he would not tell his dearest friend.”

Christ will be the one through whom God judges the world: “Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). This was not known in the Old Testament.

CONCLUSION

Why has God given these certain principles of judgment? Why has he been so strict to point up the fact that all men are sinners? Is it because he wants you to despair? Is it because he wants you to realize that when you stand before him there is no chance? Does he tell you this to torment you? No! God has recorded in Romans 2 what we all already know

about ourselves — that we fall short of our own standards and also fall short of his standards, proving ourselves sinners.

He tells us that we are sinners and under judgment so that we might turn away from ourselves and give serious consideration to the gospel of his Son, Jesus Christ. In the gospel of Jesus Christ, God has made a way by which he can offer a righteousness which is perfectly acceptable to him — a righteousness that we cannot obtain ourselves, but which has been obtained for us by the work of another, Jesus Christ. In the gospel there is a way by which we may stand before God perfectly acceptable to him, without any doubt, without any possibility of failure!

God's wrath is balanced by God's love, and God's love is seen at the Cross, where Christ died for the sins of men:

“Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood” (Rev. 1:5b).

“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10).

“And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20b).

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Have you utterly cast yourself upon the love of God and the person of Christ to save you from your sins and the wrath to come?