

God's Judgement Considered

Romans 2:1-11

How many of you have ever played carnival games?

The thing about carnival games is they are generally fairly hard to win at.

It's possible to win but the games are usually setup to make it a real challenge.

The basketball rims are a bit smaller and shaped slightly different, milk bottles are weighted and the baseball is made lighter, darts are dulled and balloons underinflated all in an effort to make things harder.

There is at least one game though that usually has no alterations, it's called Jacob's ladder.

Here is a picture of it.

The game is simple.

You start at the bottom and climb to the top and retrieve a flag or ring a bell and you win.

The challenge as you can see in the picture is that both the top and the bottom of the ladder attach to a single point which allows the ladder to spin.

I think the first time I saw that game was at a town fair about thirty years ago.

Things were a bit slow at the game and the person in charge of the game was looking to drum up some business.

His sales pitch was something like, "Take a turn at the ladder and win a prize. All you have to do is climb to the top and ring the bell."

He then demonstrated. He climbed up the ladder quickly and then climbed back down at the similar speed to show how easy it was.

His demonstration was a success and he got four or five people to line up and give it a try.

I was interested to see how it would turn out so I decided to watch.

Some people fell before leaving the first rung, others made it half way before getting flipped upside down and losing.

The thing about the ladder is the higher you get the more unstable it becomes.

It's a challenge to say the least but it is doable and if you can maintain your balance all the way to the top then you can win.

[That is a good illustration for dealing with some issues that we are confronted with in the Bible. It is very easy for us to get off balance in our thinking and end up upside down in our theology. God knows that about us and so in His Word He makes us aware of that and our text for this morning **Romans 2:1-11** is an excellent example of this. This passage follows a very clear and powerful section which speaks to us about God's wrath being "*revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.*" One of the things that can happen in our hearts when we read a passage like that is that a sense of moral superiority can take hold. We can start to condemn others and at the same time fail to feel any grief over our own failures. That's bad for us and it is bad for our testimony regarding the gospel. It's like getting flipped upside down in our thinking and so the LORD confronts that problem through the inspired work of the Apostle Paul here at the beginning of Romans two. These verses force us to consider carefully the judgement of God in at least three ways. First, we are taught that...]

Point #1 – A hypocrite thinks foolishly about God's judgement. (Verses 1-3)

Looking with condemnation on the sins of others while excusing ourselves from the evil that we commit shows a severe lack of wisdom.

Again we see the word 'therefore' at the beginning of chapter two.

Having just made crystal clear the judgement of the LORD upon those who reject God's designs and break His laws we read this in **verse 1**.

We must be careful to understand what is written here correctly.

A great many people these days want you to think that the idea of judgment here means making any kind of moral evaluation about any kind of behaviour.

So when you say to someone that their behaviour is wrong or a sin they say something like, "*Your judging me and the bible says not to judge.*"

It becomes catch all phrase intended to shut down any kind of evaluation of thoughts, feeling, or actions are right or wrong.

If that were the case then the bible as a whole would make no sense whatsoever.

Time and again we read in the Scriptures the difference between what God sees as good and what He sees as bad. We've seen that a lot already in Romans and we'll continue to see that as we make our way through the book.

Time and again God's people are commanded to point one another towards what is good and away from what is bad.

So the idea that the Christian is supposed to stay silent in the face of evil is completely wrong.

The kind of ‘judging’ that is being confronted here is the kind that condemns others and excuses ourselves.

That becomes clear in **verses 2-3**.

The phrase ‘we know’ I think is particularly convicting here.

If we read through the list given in the last part of chapter one it is safe to say that most of us know the things listed there are wrong.

We know what God’s design for marriage is, we know that envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice, and pride are wrong.

And we often prove that knowledge by pointing it out in others.

That by itself is a good thing, the problem comes in where we think to ourselves how terrible the other people are for doing these things and ignore the guilt in our own lives.

We think that other person is toast before God, but we are all good!

That kind of thinking is just plain foolish.

[Parenting has really illustrated this in my life over the years. How many parents are with us this morning? Have you ever told your kids a rule and then broken it yourself? I always tell my kids to look both ways before crossing the street and to watch for cars when they are in parking lots and not too long ago I was coming out of a store and I was opening the package of a car part that I had picked up and I stepped into the parking lot without looking and almost got flattened by a car. My first thought was, “How many times have I told my kids not to do that?” All my head shaking at people crossing the street without looking and I did the exact same thing and nearly got severely injured or worse as a result.]

It is silly to think we can look down on others for doing the same things we ourselves do and avoid suffering the same consequences.

I want you to notice the word ‘practice’ in each of the first three verses.

That suggests something that is deliberate and ongoing.

This is the pursuit of ungodly things with no intention or desire to turn away.

That is a life of unbelief and to think that we can sit in church condemning the world while excusing ourselves for the very same pattern of living and be ok shows a complete disregard for the holiness of the LORD.

[We absolutely need to be clear on what is right and wrong according to God's word, but we will end up upside down in our thinking if we turn that clarity into looking with contempt upon the sins of others and ignoring our own. If we are going to avoid that mistake then we need to know where it comes from. The next two verses show us the error that fuels a hypocritical heart and where that leads. This is the second lesson that we need to consider regarding God's judgement, that...]

Point #2 – Taking grace for granted leads to God's judgement. (Verses 4-5)

When a person thinks of the patience and kindness of the LORD as something of little worth, it will leave his heart unchanged and delighting in things that lead to eternal destruction.

The question on the table is, "Do you think you can condemn others and escape God's judgement?"

Why would anyone think that? **Verse 4**

I love how the apostle describes God's kindness here.

He tells us about 'the riches of [the LORD's] kindness.

In the original language this phrase actually comes first in the sentence which is done to emphasize its importance and priority in the thought he is sharing with believers.

The word 'kindness' can also be translated as 'goodness' or 'mercy'.

The word 'riches' is intended to show us how great or abundant the kindness/goodness/mercy of the LORD is.

Imagine a room filled with priceless treasures. Everywhere you look there are things of enormous worth from floor to ceiling and moving from one place to the next you see more and more.

That is the picture intended here regarding God's kindness.

Do we think of it that way?

When is the last time you sat down to consider all the ways in which the LORD has been kind to you?

One of the most significant ways the LORD shows His kindness towards people is by withholding the judgment that our sins deserve.

That is what Paul is driving at here when he uses the words ‘forbearance’ and ‘patience’.

It is helpful on occasion to stop and consider what would happen if God gave exactly what we deserved the moment we deserved it.

None of us would be here, but instead of giving us instant justice the LORD puts up with us.

Why? What is the purpose of His kindness? The end of the verse tells us. *‘God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?’*

If we take God’s kindness for granted, we will very easily turn it into a license to sin.

We will feel free to look with contempt on others, but put on a spiritual blindfold when it comes to our own wretched condition.

We will see no need to pursue holiness and be content with a religious façade that makes no difference in the depths of our hearts.

When we take good things for granted we miss out.

[One of the things I took for granted growing up was education. I did ok in school, but I hardly made the most of it. For example, I took French for five years and I’d be lucky to string together more than two or three coherent sentences. It was free, it was offered to me and I didn’t care and then later on when I could have used it I was left with my own ignorance.]

That is what happens when we take good things for granted, we end up being unchanged by them.

If we do that with God’s kindness, we will deceive ourselves into thinking we are different from the world when, in fact, this is what we will be doing instead. **Verse 5**

In chapter 1:18-32 we are told of God’s wrath being revealed in the present time by the LORD giving people over to their evil desires.

Here we are being told of a future day when all people throughout history will stand before the throne of God for final judgement.

Presuming God’s kindness and persisting in things that God hates with no thought of turning from them is ‘storing up wrath’ for that day.

[If the kindness of the LORD is a small thing in our hearts our affection for Christ will be small and our love of sin will be great, and that will lead us to judgment before the throne of the Almighty. “Surely not me!” Someone will say. “I’ve come from a Christian home! I’ve come to church all my life. I’m not as bad as people in prison or even my neighbor across the street. I’m sure the LORD will go easy on me.” Many deceive themselves by thinking like this, but as we continue considering the judgment of the LORD in this passage we must see this third lesson. There is no special treatment for people on account of social standing or family background, but instead we see here that...]

Point #3 – God’s judgement is always applied consistently. (Verses 6-11)

When people stand before the throne of the LORD to face the verdict He will give upon their lives, His justice will be applied rightly to everyone.

Listen with me to verses 6-11.

On the surface it sounds like this is saying that everything depends on a person’s works.

Those who patiently strive to do good and seek glory and honour will be given glory, honour, and eternal life or peace in the fullest sense of the word.

On the other hand those who are self-seeking, who refuse to obey the truth, and instead live under the compulsion of unrighteousness will receive wrath, fury, tribulation, and distress.

That sounds like if we do good things we get good things and if we do bad things we will get bad things.

If that sounds a bit troubling to you, that is a good thing because I believe the apostle intends it that way.

What he is doing here is building a case for our need of the gospel.

We can see that clearly if we see what is written here is the bigger context of Romans and ask a couple of very important questions.

One really important question we have to ask is this, “Who does bad things?”

What is the answer to that question? I would guess that the kids who are with us in service this morning know the answer to that question.

Who does bad things? The answer is everybody.

If we are left to ourselves everything we do is bad.

Of course someone will object and say, “Wait a minute non-Christians can do good things.”

That is absolutely true, unbelievers often do nice things for their neighbors, they love their kids, they can be kind to the poor, they can work hard, give money to good causes, etc.

But listen, apart from faith every single one of those good deeds is stained with the sin of idolatry and on top of that everyone is guilty breaking God's laws on a regular basis.

Good deeds can never excuse bad deeds.

Giving to charity does not excuse robbing a bank.

Everyone does bad things and whoever refuses to obey the truth and continues obeying unrighteousness will receive God's judgement, Paul says, the Jew first and also the Greek.

The Jews being descendants of Abraham were set apart as God's chosen people.

They received the blessing of being chosen by God, God sent them prophets to teach them His ways, He gave them the gift of the temple and true worship before any other nation.

None of the privileges of that heritage will change how God's law gets applied to them if they 'do not obey the truth'.

There is not one set of laws for some people and another for everyone else. Everyone has the law applied to their evil deeds in perfect justice before the throne of God.

That is the plain conclusion of verse 11, 'God shows no partiality.'

Now we must also ask the question, "Who does good things?"

Who can have a genuine desire to seek and share in God's glory and honour?

Only someone who has believed the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is only someone who understands that on their own all their good deeds are nothing but filthy rags before a Holy God as it says in Isaiah 64:6.

It is only someone who understands their need to be washed clean by the blood of Jesus sacrifice.

It is only someone who understands their need for Jesus to take upon Himself all our bad things and place upon us all of His goodness.

It is this kind of person that is truly born again and desires to seek first the kingdom of heaven.

It is the person who understands that are not saved by works but that saving faith produces works in our lives.

It is this person who receives glory, honour, and peace in doing good, the Jew first and also the Greek.

God is still committed to His covenant with Abraham. Paul knew that which is why he always went to the synagogue first to preach Christ to the Jews because he knew that every promise in the Bible is ultimately fulfilled in Christ.

And God's promise to Abraham was bigger than just the Jews for He promised that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through him.

And so it is that people from every tribe, tongue, and nation can come into the kingdom through the cross and empty tomb of King Jesus.

There is consistency in the judgement of God.

We are all subject to the law in the same way and we can all receive His grace in the same way.

Understanding that is a powerful antidote to hypocrisy.

It keeps us from looking with condemnation at others while doing the same things we are judging.

It enables us to call people out of sin through love and compassion and seek to turn away from the evil in our own lives because our hearts have been changed.

It allows us to see the riches of His kindness day after day and live like we really do appreciate the immeasurable worth of grace.

This weekend is thanksgiving. Christians of all people should be a thankful people for all the grace and mercy shown to us.

On account of this glorious grace we can learn to rest in the consistency of the LORD.

These are some of the blessings of considering carefully God's judgement.

May God in His mercy enable us to think rightly about His justice so that we might fully and rightly delight in the riches of His kindness.