**Romans**

**Lesson 3: The Judgment of God Romans 2:1-16**

In chapter 1, Paul shows that God has revealed Himself to the world, yet the world suppresses the evidence. One of the main reasons people suppress the truth of God’s existence is so they can do whatever they desire. When a person acknowledges God’s existence, he also must know that he is accountable to Him. Again, the reason for the suppression of this truth is unbridled freedom. As a result of that freedom, mankind turns away from God and falls deeper and deeper into sin.

According to Paul, in suppressing the reality of God’s existence, mankind has rejected God. Consequently, the world has given itself over to godlessness and wickedness. Thus, God’s wrath is being revealed from heaven against all of mankind. How so? His abandonment of men to do as they please reveals God’s wrath. God has given the world over to sexual impurity, unnatural sexual relationships, and depravity of all kinds, e.g., greed, envy, strife, gossip, slander, arrogance, faithlessness, and ruthlessness. Despite knowing God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, men continue in their sinfulness and even applaud those who do likewise.

Many people read the list of sins in Romans 1 and respond, “I’m glad I’m not like those people.” But what does Paul say? “You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things” (Romans 2:1). Here, Paul declares that self-righteous people are blind to their sin, and they cannot see the “plank” in their own eye (Matthew 7:3-4).

When Paul wrote Romans, Jews considered Gentiles to be horrible sinners. They even referred to them as “dogs.” Jews saw themselves as God’s children. They had been given the Law of Moses. They participated in all of the Temple rituals. They saw themselves as good and moral. By contrast, the Gentiles had no law; therefore, the Jews saw them as pagans who did whatever   
they pleased. Gentiles were not even allowed into the Temple, and Jews would never enter Gentiles’ homes to avoid defilement. In other words, Jews believed they were clean while Gentiles were dirty.

Modern-day religious people can be compared to the Jews of Paul’s day. They don’t really see themselves as sinners. They see themselves as better than others. Thus, they look down on people who sin outwardly, not realizing that their inward sins are just as bad. Keller writes,

A self-righteous person will acknowledge the existence of God, but sees no need for him. They are doing well enough themselves. They are their own savior. Ultimately, they deserve glory for themselves. It is the attitude of the person who welcomes God’s wrath on others but thinks they themselves are entirely exempt. They see no need for repentance, and have no realization that God is kindly holding back his judgment in order to give them an opportunity to turn to him in humility and for mercy.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Self-righteous religious people often miss that they commit the same sins as those over whom they stand in judgment. On the one hand, you have pagans who are lost. On the other hand, you have religious, moral people who are lost. What is the real difference between the two? Dr. John Stott writes,

It is that the first group do things they know to be wrong and approve of others who do them (1:32), which is at least consistent; whereas the second group do what they know to be wrong and condemn others who do them, which is hypocritical. The first group disassociate themselves entirely from God’s righteous decree, in regard to both themselves and others; whereas the second group deliberately identify themselves with it by setting themselves up as judges, only to find that they are being judged for doing the same things.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Both groups of people, lost pagans, and lost moralists, will face God’s judgment one day. Paul makes it clear that God’s judgment is real, and it is coming. It is inescapable. And those who reject his grace and mercy will stand before Him to be judged one day. How will God judge them? God will judge them according to their deeds and by his righteous standard—the Law. He will take into account everything they have said and done. Nothing will be hidden from God’s sight. Everything will be laid bare before the One to whom mankind must give an account. God’s judgment is certain. God’s judgment is righteous. He will render exact retribution—the foundation of justice. Stott continues, “Although justification is indeed by faith, judgment will be according to works.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Finally, God’s judgment will be impartial. It will not matter whether one is Jew or Gentile, moral or heathen, rich or poor, or black or white. All will be judged according to the light they have been given. To whom much has been given, much will be required. Likewise, to whom little has been given, little will be required. Everyone has been given a measure of light because, at the very least, everyone has a God-given conscience to which he will be held accountable.

The day of salvation is today. We are living in a period of grace. At the moment, everyone has the opportunity to come to the cross and experience God’s grace and mercy. We are free to choose. Our sins can be judged at the cross, or if we die in our sins, they will be judged on the Day of Judgment. God has given us this choice, which Paul spells out for all to hear and understand in the early chapters of Romans. Paul explains that we are all guilty because we are all sinners. But, in the chapters that follow, he will show us that God has provided the only way to escape His wrath and judgment.

DAY 1. Read Luke 15:11-32.

1. Understand that a parable usually is intended to make only two to three key points. With that understanding, what is the main lesson of the Parable of the Lost Son?
2. Who might the following represent?
   1. The father:
   2. The younger son:
   3. The elder son:
3. Knowing that we are all sinners, which son do you think saw his sin more clearly? Why?
4. In Luke 5:29-32, Jesus answered them (the religious Pharisees): “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” Explain.

DAY 2. Read Romans 2:1-16.

1. What do we tend to do when we read about people who commit the sins listed in   
   Romans 1:24-32?
2. What does Paul say about us when we pass judgment on others?
3. Read Matthew 5:21-22 and 27-28. How did Jesus “raise the bar” when it comes to committing sin?
4. Read James 2:10-11.
   1. What must one do to break God’s law?
   2. Are you guilty of breaking the law? If so, what does that make you?
5. According to Paul, God’s judgment will be based upon three principles. In other words, God judges according to what?
   1. Verse 2: God judges according to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_!
   2. Verses 6-11: God judges according to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_!
   3. Verses 12-15: God judges according to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_!
6. Would God be justified in judging us all and simply destroying us? If so, why   
   doesn’t He (v. 4)?
   1. Read Titus 2:11 and 2 Peter 3:9. What is the purpose of God’s kindness and patience?
   2. How have you responded to God’s kindness and patience?
7. How does Paul describe the heart of a man who will not surrender to God’s grace?
   1. Read Ezekiel 36:26-27. What did the prophet Ezekiel see happening to the heart of man when he looked into the future?
   2. To what event in the New Testament was Ezekiel looking forward (Acts 2:1-4)?
   3. Have you received the Holy Spirit by faith (Ephesians 1:13-14)? Share when and how this happened.

DAY 3. Read Romans 2:4-11.

1. Paul writes, “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.”
   1. Explain.
   2. Read Revelation 19:11-16 and 20:11-15. When will God’s righteous judgment be revealed and how will it be revealed?
2. In verses 7-10, Paul appears to suggest that a man who produces good deeds will receive glory, honor, and eternal life. What Paul is stating here is that if anyone can live a perfect life, that is, “persist in doing good,” that person will be rewarded with eternal life and glory. However, Scripture (Romans 3:10, 23) makes it clear that “no one is righteous.” That is, none can persist in doing good works. Thus, what is the one good deed (work) which a man must do in order to be saved (John 6:28-29)?

DAY 4. Read Romans 2:12-16.

1. Read Luke 12:47-48. Paul is teaching a very important principle in these verses concerning God’s judgment. God’s judgment will be impartial. God’s judgment will be just and fair. Finally, God’s judgment will be based upon the “light” one has received.
   1. Explain what it means to be judged based on the “light” one has received.
   2. How much light have you received compared to someone who has grown up in a Muslim country? Who will be held more accountable?
2. The moral argument for the existence of God suggests that if there is a universal moral law that is present in everyone, then there must be a Moral Law Giver. How does Paul express this in verses 14-15?
3. Read Psalm 33:13-15 and Hebrews 4:12-13. Will we be able to hide our innermost thoughts from God on the Day of Judgment?

Verse 16 is a significant verse: *This will take place on the day when God will judge men’s secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.* After writing about God’s judgment, Paul desires to remind readers of the gospel. Without the reality of God’s present and future wrath and judgment, the cross loses its power and purpose. If for no other reason, Paul’s aim in warning of God’s coming Day of Judgment is to instill fear into the reader so that he or she will turn to the cross for the remedy.

Paul has warned that men who suppress the truth and turn to other idols are given over by God to their evil desires. This is the worst judgment a man can receive—to be given over to his sinful desires, that is, to be abandoned by God. Paul explains that men who stand in judgment of outward sinners are just as guilty, for they commit the same sins. They, too are given over to their stubborn, unrepentant hearts and are storing up wrath against themselves. Thus, the big question is this: What is the solution?

What is the remedy? Is there any hope for anyone? The answer is a resounding yes! It is the gospel. The gospel of Jesus Christ provides the remedy. What is the gospel? *“That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures…”* (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Any man who is drawn to the cross of Christ by the riches of God’s kindness must come to the place where he recognizes that he is a sinner in need of God’s mercy. And any man who recognizes his need for a Savior and turns away from his sin to Christ will be given mercy. Furthermore, that man will receive the righteousness from God that comes by faith.

This is the remedy—the righteousness of God. This is what Martin Luther came to realize when he read Romans 1:16-17, where Paul writes, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel *a righteousness from God* is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written, ‘The righteous will live by *faith.*’” (emphasis added). This righteousness comes from God and is only found in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Have you come to Jesus by faith? *Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance, and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness leads you toward repentance?* (2:4) Come to the cross while you can and place your trust in Jesus Christ. That is man’s only hope—the wonder of the gospel.

1. Ibid., 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid., 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid., 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)