

You're No Different

Romans 2:1-5

April 30, 2017

Introduction:

King David is one of the most fascinating people we run across in the Bible, no doubt helped in part by the large amounts of Scripture dedicated to his both the events of his life as well as his own personal reflections recorded throughout the book of Psalms. One of those famous stories of his life (or should I say "infamous stories") is what transpired between him and a woman by the name of Bathsheba. Long story short: David let his lust get the best of him and impregnated Bathsheba, who happened to be the wife of one of David loyal soldiers named Uriah. David tried to cover up his crime by calling Uriah back from the battlefield to sleep with his wife, but when that didn't work, David had Uriah placed in the front line of battle so that he would be killed. Then he took Bathsheba to be his wife.

This was all done hush-hush like, and David might have gotten away with it, if it wasn't for a prophet named Nathan. One day Nathan comes to David and reports to him that a rich man who possessed many animals had taken away from a poor man the single lamb he owned. As readers, we know Nathan's story is just a set-up, and like Admiral Ackbar we want to shout out, "It's a trap!" but David doesn't see it and so in great anger David replies, *"As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."*

David came down hash in his judgment of this guy only to find out that the guy Nathan was speaking of was in fact King David himself. No sooner than David passes judgment on him, Nathan replies, "You are the man!" Busted! David was so blind to his sin that while he was quick to rush to judgment against someone else, he couldn't see that he was guilty of doing the exact same thing.

This morning, the apostle Paul is going to do for us what Nathan did for David. He's going to call us to recognize that all those sins we so readily and harshly judge others for are also true of us. We're in no position to sit atop our high horse and look down our noses at those dirty, rotten sinners out there because we're no different. The sin that resides in them also resides in us, so we have no right to think of ourselves more highly than anyone else.

So if you would, please open your Bibles to Romans 2, which can be found on pg. 940 of the pew Bibles, should you be using one of those this morning. Today we're going to give our attention to the first five verses of Romans 2. Please follow along as I read Romans 2: 1-5. **"You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance? 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."

Sounds like we're in for a serious shellacking today, doesn't it? Admittedly, this is a pointed passage, but believe it or not, it's not all bad news. There's two sides to the coin we'll be looking at and so I want us to see how both are important for us to understand. So I have four points this morning that make up two sentences, each of which present both sides of the coin, as it were. So let's begin with the first sentence, which begins...

1. We are condemned for doing the same things we judge others for...

You might remember that back in Romans 1, the apostle Paul was laying out the reason the wrath of God was being revealed against mankind. He said that although God had revealed himself through creation such that people should have honored him and given him thanks, instead they chose to worship the creation instead of the Creator. As a result, three times Paul mentioned God "gave them up" to all manner of sin which Paul spelled out in detail in v. 24-32 of Romans 1.

Now throughout that section in Romans 1, Paul referred to people in the third person singular, using the word "they." *They* had exchanged the truth of God for a lie. *They* gave up natural relations for unnatural ones. God gave *them* up to a debased mind so that *they* were filled with all manner of unrighteousness. Paul was looking out at the pagan world in general and describing their sin.

"They" is a very comfortable word, isn't it? It provides distance. It keeps whoever "they" are at arm's length because I'm not included in the word "they." Whatever their faults are, that's them and not me. If it's "we," then I'm included, but "they," well, that's not my problem. "They" isn't about me. So then, it could be easy for Paul's readers at this point to think to themselves, "Glad I'm not like *those* people. You sure won't find me worshipping some kind of chicken-duck-woman-thing goddess or engaged in gross sinful practices like *those* godless pagans do."

So then, v. 1 of chapter 2 strikes like a thunderbolt out of the clear blue sky when Paul says, **"You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things."**

Paul has a keen understanding of the human heart, doesn't he? Is it not easy for us to condemn the sin in others all the while either ignoring or excusing our own? Isn't this just what Jesus repeatedly warned of, saying we need to deal that plank in our own eye before we worry about the speck in others? Was not Jesus' explanation of the true meaning of the Law in the Sermon on the Mount meant to show us that we're guilty of breaking the very same commandments we're so quick to judge others for?

It's easy to come home from work and watch the news and listen to story after story about murders and rapists and crooked politicians and smugly think to ourselves, "Well, at least I'm not like them! What's wrong with those people anyway? A bunch of

godless, immoral pagans is what they are.” Maybe we aren’t bold enough to verbalize it, but we think it. Deep inside, we think it. It’s easy to judge those who do the things we don’t do in order to fuel our own self-righteous appreciation of ourselves.

But Paul cuts to the chase and says, you do the same things. You’re no better. Sure, you didn’t open fire at a movie theatre and kill a dozen people, but Jesus said your anger towards another is the same in God’s sight as murder. So then, that Facebook post where you angrily slandered that person before the eyes of a few hundred of your friends, is that not mass carnage in God’s eyes as well? Or perhaps you take some comfort that you don’t engage in a homosexual lifestyle or that you haven’t ever cheated on your spouse, but if you’ve lusted after a woman in your heart, then you’re guilty of sexual immorality just as much as the flamboyant homosexual that you saw marching in the gay pride parade on TV. Or consider Solomon for a moment: Solomon may have had a 1000 wives - and that wasn’t good - but how many naked women have you looked at on the internet? If Solomon committed adultery 1000 times, what’s your number measured by the pornographic images you’ve viewed? You just might make Solomon look like an amateur by comparison.

So Paul gives us a stern warning in v. 3 saying, **“So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God’s judgment?”** Our danger is thinking we’re the exception to the rule. We believe that when we break God’s law, we have a valid excuse. It’s someone else’s fault. It’s because I had a difficult childhood. God made me this way. That person deserved it. So on and so forth. But none of that will fly before God. You and I are just as guilty of sinning as they and them. Our sin may differ in degree but not in consequence. All sin results in God’s judgment. None of us gets to escape it. There is no time off for good behavior. We don’t get a pass because we were relatively less wicked than the other guy. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. All. No exceptions. Jew and Gentile. Young and old. Male and female. Gay and straight. Blue-collar, white collar, those unemployed, and those living on welfare. Read though the vice list Paul gave in Romans 1 and try with a straight face claim nothing listed there has ever been true of you. You can’t. God’s wrath is not for a select few, really bad people; it’s for you and me and everyone else on the planet because everyone has sinned.

So we need to see ourselves rightly and not just look down our nose on other people and act as if we have some position or moral authority over them: we don’t. We are sinners as well and we would be wise to spend far more time repenting of our own sin than being angry and disgusted by the sin in everyone else. Paul is pointing the finger at each and every one of us and so we need to recognize the sin in ourselves first

But that being said, there’s another side to this coin that I need to highlight because if I don’t, we might become so paralyzed by fear of being a judgmental hypocrite that we’re no longer willing to make any moral judgments at all. So let me complete the sentence I began where I said for our first point that **we are condemned for doing the same things we judge others for**, but now let me add to that our second point...

2. ...but we are not condemned for making moral judgments

My concern here is that you might mistake this to be implying that we can't make any moral judgments at all. Certainly our culture seems to take things this way. Should you try to call out anyone for doing something sinful, it won't take them to long to reply with, "As if you're any better." For example, speak against gay marriage and the whole issue of divorce between Christians will be brought up as if to say, "Don't speak to me about the importance of protecting the sanctity of marriage when you Christians get divorced as much as anyone else." In other words, since you're a hypocrite, you have no right to judge others because you're no different.

But is that what we're to take from this passage, that because we sin we can't make any moral judgments whatsoever? That judging others is the ultimate sin that us hypocritical Christians are constantly guilty of? I don't believe so and here's why. Look back at v. 1. **"You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because..."** Let's stop there. Our culture would have the next words to read, "Because you're judgmental." "Judge not, lest you be judged," is the favorite Bible verse of those who've never read the Bible, and so they would claim that judging others is the worse sin of all. But the reason for God's wrath given here isn't found in making moral judgments. How does he finish the sentence? **"...because you who pass judgment do the same things."** It's not passing judgement that's wrong but rather the fact that we do the same things we are judging. Our problem isn't in the moral evaluation of sin but the personal practice of it.

Notice what v. 2 says. We skipped it before but look at it now. **"Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth."** God judges sin. He evaluates us against his holy standard of righteousness and finds that we have failed to pass the test. But is God in the wrong to judge us this way? No. It is right for God to say, "This is wrong and this is right," because his judgment is based on what? **"Truth."** God looks at sin and calls it what it is because of the truth of who he is and what his Word calls us to be.

So when it comes to us, we can and should say to others, "This is sin," when it is sin. Provided we're judging according to the truth of God's Word, it's what we should do. But what we shouldn't do is think we don't share in the same guilt as everyone else, or that our sin is less serious. So for example, we need to call sexually immorality what it is: it's a sin. Sex before marriage is sinful. Adultery is sinful. Homosexual behavior is sinful. Looking at pornography is sinful. There is nothing wrong with any of us pointing that out to others. In fact, it's what we must do because if people never recognize they're sinners, they'll never see the need for a Savior. So yes, call sin, "sin." We can and must in light of the truth of God's Word make moral judgment on people's actions.

But as soon as you place yourself on a different level than those people, as soon as you make excuses for your sin and look down on others for doing the very same things you do, then you've crossed the line. You best be willing to acknowledge you're in the same filthy trenches of sin with all the other warriors of wickedness. So then, don't give into our cultural lie that says unless you are perfect in every way, you can never judge the

actions of others. You can and you must. But you dare not be self-righteous about it. You need to see that the sin in them is the sin also in you and the same judgment they deserve is as equally deserved by you for your sin. The ground is level at the foot of the cross and so we best be kneeling before it in humble acknowledgment of our own sin wherever we need to point out that same sin in others.

Now all this talk about sin and judgment can be rather discouraging to say the least, so let me move on now and perhaps shine some light into this very dark place that is our sin. So the third point I want us to consider is that...

3. God in his kindness is patient with us, so as to lead us to repentance...

Look back in your Bibles at v. 4. Paul asks this question, “**Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?**” Even though this verse is part of Paul’s warning against us self-righteously judging the sin in others while minimizing our own, I don’t want us to miss what it says about God’s kindness us. In fact, it mentions three aspects of God’s character: “**his kindness, forbearance and patience.**” Why does Paul mention these positive aspects of God amid a section on God’s wrath?

We need to know that God’s wrath against sin is not the whole story. Yes, God will punish sin in his wrath and even now his wrath is being revealed by giving us over to further depths of sin as result of not honoring him and giving him thanks. We must look that square in the face, no doubt about it. But at the same time, God is also showing patience and kindness towards sinners by not immediately giving them what they deserve. He is “**forbearing**” sin, meaning he’s allow it to remain unpunished for the time being. Judgement will come, but not yet.

That’s good news because given our sin, given all the ways we disobey God and rebel against him as laid out in Romans 1, God would have every right to zap us with lightning the moment we first stepped out of line. Imagine if God dealt the punishment we deserved as soon as we earned it. We’d live mighty short lives if he did, wouldn’t we? Instead, what happens? We sin and... we keep living. We draw another breath and another and another and go on living year after year and decade after decade without the ground opening up beneath us and ushering us into eternal death. That’s my friends, is the amazing kindness of God. We rebel against him and he allows us to keep living. The hammer doesn’t fall upon us immediately.

Imagine you owned a restaurant and one of your employees constantly disobeyed you. He disregarded all your rules. He was constantly rude to the customers. Every time he worked the cash register would come up short because he was stealing from it. Then on break he would do nothing but insult and slander you to the other employees. Once that came to your attention, wouldn’t you fire him immediately? You wouldn’t let him continuing working for months and months while he continued to behave like that.

Yet that is in a sense exactly what God does with us. His disobey his commandments, treat people created in his image disrespectfully, abuse the good gifts he has given us

in creation, and neither give him thanks nor give him any kind of honor. We do this over and over and over again and yet we continue to live, often for many years. God would have every right to put an end to our rebellious lives but he doesn't. He leaves our sin unpunished. In his kindness he shows us patience such that he gives us time to repent.

Too often we think that God owes us a long life, that everyone should be given a good 80 or so years to live on this earth and so when someone dies young we question why God would take someone at such a young age. But our thinking is all wrong. What we should really be asking is why does God put up with us so long? Why doesn't he just bring the axe down as soon as we begin to sin against him? If we really are sinners as Paul says we are, then the amazing thing is that any of us are here at all.

So let's recalibrate our thinking and be grateful that God's kindness is such that he's allowed any of us to continue in our sin for years upon years without ever calling us to account. God doesn't give us what we deserve as soon as we deserve it because he is giving us the opportunity to repent. So if you are drawing breath right now, that is the amazing kind and patient grace of God allowing you to do so. If you're feeling the sting of your sinful choices, God is allowing you to suffer those consequences so you might come to your senses and repent. Though we indeed are sinners, who sin just as much as anyone else, God is giving us the opportunity to repent of our sin and find forgiveness in Christ.

But this window of opportunity for repentance doesn't remain open forever. A day will come for each of us when we will draw our last breath and the kindness of God given to us will come to its end and instead we will face a day of reckoning. So moving on now to our fourth point, although **God in his kindness is patient with us, so as to lead us to repentance...**

4. ... but the day will come when God's righteous judgment will be revealed against the unrepentant

Look again at v. 5. **"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."** For everyone, the clock is ticking. Everyone in this room right now will be dead in 100 years or less. Sometime between this morning and the year 2117 you will face God, either because you will die or Christ will return and all will need to stand before the judgment seat of God Almighty. We may not know when it will happen but rest assured it *will* happen. One day God's righteous judgment against sin will be revealed. No more will the kind forbearance of God patiently allow you to go on sinning while he continues to bless you with health and sunshine and food and drink. A day of reckoning is coming for all of us.

For those who are unrepentant, who stubbornly refuse to give up their sin and instead want to continue to live as if they're the god of their own private universe, then take note of what is happening behind the scenes. Paul says in v 5, **"You are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath."** God's righteous anger against you is increasing, its building up, and one day it will be released.

I think of the Hoover Dam in Nevada. I don't know if you ever have had the chance to visit it but I have and it's huge. Lake Mead formed as a result of the dam, a lake that covers 247 square miles and holds, get this, 4 trillion gallons of water, enough water to satisfy the water needs of Las Vegas for the next 40 years. Hoover dam is holding back all that water. Imagine what would happen if the dam burst. All that water, all that pent up energy would be released. It would be hard to comprehend what that would be like, to see all that water that has been backed up over all these years suddenly released.

But that's small change compared to what Paul is warning of here. Like water being stored up behind Hoover Dam, so is God's wrath being stored up against unrepentant sin. Every day of your life that you live in open rebellion and rejection of God, the level rises a little higher. You may not even be aware of it. You might be happily living your life, doing what you want, with not a care in the world about God and his Word, and you think all is well because life is going well. Yet slowly but surely, you are storing up God's wrath against you. The level is rising. God's patience with you will not last forever. One day, the dam will break. Then the wrath of God you've been storing up from a lifetime of unrepentant sin will finally and violently erupt upon you.

That is the terrifying reality that awaits all of us, unless you have trusted in Christ as your Lord and Savior. On the cross, the wrath of God was unleashed against the sins of those who trust in him. Jesus suffered and die in the place of sinners so that we wouldn't have to. But for those who have not repented of their sins and placed their faith in Christ, then the cross is of no benefit to them. For them, the wrath of God is still building up, one day to be released on Judgment Day. But if you have trusted in Christ, then you need not fear any condemnation because Christ died for you. The wrath of God you had stored up against you was poured out upon Christ instead. This is why the gospel is such good news: Christ has received God's wrath so you won't have to. What Paul warns of here is nothing we need to dread if Christ is our Lord.

Conclusion

So then, let me conclude by both encouraging you and warning you, since this passage contains both. First, we need to be wise to listen to the warning that God's wrath is being stored up against all who are unrepentant. We dare not look down our noses in judgment of the sins of others without recognizing our own. Yes, we need to call sin, sin, but we best be aware of how it dwells in us before we concern ourselves with how it manifests itself in others. None of us have an excuse to be self-righteous. When it comes to being sinners, you're no different than anyone else.

But also be encouraged by the reminder that God's isn't quick to give us what we deserve. He is slow to anger and willing to forgive all who come to him in repentance and faith. As long as you are still drawing breath, God is still willing to forgive. Run to Christ, where the wrath of God and the love of God meet for all those who turn from their sin and look to him alone as their Lord and Savior. Let's pray.

This sermon was addressed originally to the people at Grace Fellowship of Waterloo, IA by Pastor Rob Borkowitz. Copyright 2017.