

Romans 2 (Part 1)

The Impartiality of God

1Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. 2And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things.

Paul wrote this letter to the church in Rome. In the Roman church there were converted pagans worshipping along side converted Jews. Many converted pagans formerly held to a life of idolatry, sexual perversion, and other things that really turned the stomach of the religious Jew. And the religious Jews who had converted to Christianity in Rome sat next to people who were very different.

It would be tempting for the converted religious Jew to think he or she was better than the converted pagan. I could see a situation where factions might have developed in the church with converted Jews thinking they were the only ones fit to become Elders or leaders in the church. After all they were the ones who were originally entrusted with the word of God and His blessings. Yes the pagans can be saved but perhaps they are not quite as spiritual as we are.

Paul is addressing religious pride and judgmental attitudes either because it was a problem or because it might have become a problem in the Roman Church. Let's listen to Paul write to Jews who were passing judgment on others even while those who passed judgment were not living as they should.

3But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God?

STORY – GET RID OF THAT CRAZY PERSON

I remember many years ago working at a church at which were a number of very well to do individuals, many of whom had jobs with IBM or the tech industry. They dressed well and came across as bright professionals who seemed to have their life together. What a wonderful group of people to work with.

All seemed well until we experienced an influx of people who had many physical and mental health issues. And though they were welcomed by most with open arms, there was a small group of individuals who looked down their noses at these troubled souls.

I remember spending several counseling sessions with a lady who had posttraumatic stress resulting from childhood physical and sexual abuse. The sessions got loud as she cried and wailed finally dealing with the pain of her past. After one of the sessions a long standing church members; a young professional in her mid thirties approached me and stated in no uncertain terms that if I did not get rid of the crazy people it might scare away the normal people. According to this person the homosexuals who wanted to give up their old way of life, the drug users who were getting set free and especially the people with mental problems had to go.

My response went something like this. If Jesus can't set them free, who can? Where do you suggest that we send them? The greater the problems the more power of God we will see on display at work setting people free. I asked her if she thought church should be like a gated

community or a hospital for the sick? She grunted smugly and headed off to gain support for her quest to get rid of the people with problems.

The greatest sin in that time was not on behalf of those who came for healing or repent for their ungodly lifestyle. It was the sin of religious pride. It was the sin of thinking that one cleaned up person who had her life all together was more loved by Jesus than the person whose life used to look like a train wreck.

No matter our religious background or pedigree God will judge us not on how much we know or what family we are related to or how professional we look or how long we have claimed to be a church member or a Christian. Religious pride is a great sin in the eyes of the Lord. It was religious pride that kept many Jews from acknowledging Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

And today religious pride is the ruin of many churches. Religious pride creates factions in churches and it causes many to love the rules and the religious activity more than it loves Jesus. And often it takes a great humbling for those with religious pride to admit their sin and repent. Why? Because it is easy to hide religious pride behind a mask of behavior that looks good on the outside even while one's heart is dark and unloving and filled with prideful judgment and arrogance.

4Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?

That God lets sin go on for a season should not give us the idea that God does not care about what we do. His kindness and mercy and given so that we have time to turn from our sin and repent. In the history of Israel we discover that God displayed patience hoping that Israel would turn from her sin and idolatry. Israel had plenty of time to turn back to God. But

eventually God gave Israel over to captivity because he was not going to bless a nation that did not fear, love or acknowledge God.

5But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, 6who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS:

Paul is saying to the pride filled Jew who claims to be a Christian, drop the religious pride. Now is your time to admit that you are not as great as you think you are. If you want to examine someone and fault find, ask God to show you your own faults. Now is the time to get right with God. God is not impressed that we serve on a committee or that we know the bible well enough to point out other people's faults. We are accountable to put into practice what we know.

7to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; 8but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.

Here is the contrast between the God directed life and the self directed life. Religious activity is not enough to cover our sin. Is God in control of our decisions and our attitude toward others?

9There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek,

Some Jews liked to brag that they were the first to know God. They were the first to take possession of the Holy Scriptures. But in this text, Paul is saying that if you are so proud of being first and you know so much, you can be the first in line to the judgment if you do not get your life right with God. Head knowledge never helped anyone escape the wrath of God.

13for it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified.

Since my arrival at Winter Wisconsin I have preached 217 sermons. I think I can honestly say that I have preached and will continue to preach the word of God and His requirements to the best of my ability and most importantly with the leading and guidance and under the power of the Holy Spirit.

One of the greatest joys of my life is when you respond to the Word of God as it is preached and take the challenge that is given and actually make changes in your life when you are convicted to do so. When I preached about how to listen to God and respond to the voice of the Spirit of God many of you put into practice the teaching that was given. When I spoke about sharing the burden of evangelism many of you began to reach out with internationality to your friends and neighbors praying for them daily and inviting them to church so they could hear and be transformed by the Word of God. Your response to the Word of God is the greatest joy of this preacher.

Conversely, the greatest sorrow is when I preach clearly on a topic from the word of God and I confront sin or communicate something that we should be doing, and there is little or no response. I might hear, “hey pastor, that was a great sermon.” But the thing I am looking for is that each person honestly and with humility look at his or her life in light of what was preached and line up his or her life with the will and Word of God. God approves not of those who go to church and listen to the sermon. He approves of those who put these things into practice.

Thank you for each time you have responded to the Word of God. That makes my life and ministry a joy and more importantly it brings joy to

the heart of God. Don't listen for more head knowledge. Listen for ways you can put the preaching into practice. That alone is pleasing to God.

You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal? 22 You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? 23 You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God?

To rob a temple was considered a diabolical act among the Jews. Yet many Jews found ways to avoid giving generously to the work of God. By doing so they themselves were robbing the temple of God. So much for finger pointing.

24 For "THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU," just as it is written.

Paul quotes Isaiah 52:5. In the Old Testament the Jews were prideful about their special status with God. They were the first to receive the law. They were God's chosen people. But the Jews did not obey their own law, specially given by God. They turned to idolatry, the very thing they preached against. And God gave them over to defeat and captivity. Israel became the laughing stock of the world and so did their God. Why would God trust these prideful and unfaithful Jews with His special blessing and His Holy Word?

The Jews had an opportunity in Rome to lead many people to Christ. Would their pride and judgmental attitude and their personal sin get in the way of the message. Would their life and attitude drive people away from Jesus Christ or lead them toward salvation?

And in our town, what do people say of individuals who attend the church? What is your reputation? Do they see the love of Christ when they see you? When you meet people in town do you ask God to give you his

love and compassion for others? Who is the last person you went out of your way to serve or show compassion? What is the reputation of the church? Are we faithful to what we preach? Are we pride filled and unconcerned about others? Are we creating a good name for Jesus or a black eye for the gospel? If we love God and we love people we will be in pretty good shape.

28For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. 29But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

Paul is saying once again, that it is not enough to be religious. We need to connect our hearts to God through prayer and meditative scripture reading to the point where we can actually discern the will of God in our hearts and have his love flowing through us.

The challenge from the Word of God today is not a challenge for the pagan. It is a challenge for the religious. If you have been a Christian for a while and you are growing in your knowledge of the Word of God this text is for you. If you know the calendar and you know the routine of how the service goes and you know all the rules of when we stand and when we sit and when we speak and when we are to be quiet, this message is for you. If you know the rules about how the committees work and how decisions are made and how officers are elected this message is for you.

It is possible to be well acquainted with church life and become familiar with how the practical aspects of the church work. But this text reminds us that all of the religious stuff is nothing to take pride in. It is nothing to get our life from or fight over. What really matters is that each day we learn to love Jesus more than we did yesterday. And we learn to ask God to show us not the faults of others, but to show us honestly if there are

things in our life that we need to give over to Him. And what really matters is that we are more than hearers of the word and watchers of ministry but that we meditate on what we have heard and ask the Holy Spirit to show us how He wants us to apply what we have heard in our life.