

## Condemnation for the Self-Righteous Moralist – Part 1

Romans 2:1-5

As always it is my joy to minister the Word of God to you this morning. We come once again to Paul's epistle to the Romans. We have made it through the first chapter and now we begin our study of chapter two. So if you will turn there with me.

And while you are turning let me prepare your hearts with some thoughts. Attending funerals are always fascinating to me, because there we learn much about the theology of the deceased, the theology of his church, his family. And I find it interesting that in all of the funerals I have been to so far every single person has batted 1000. Every person that has died went to heaven. Not once have I heard anything to the contrary.

For example would never hear the pastor say—and I am not suggesting that he should say this. There are ways of doing funerals and saying it without saying it, but you never hear a pastor say, “We are especially saddened today because John Doe, although a devoutly religious man, a good and honest man, although he was an outstanding father and citizen, nevertheless, he has perished in his sins and he now is experiencing the torments of hell.

“Why? Because he lived a lie. He was convinced that since he was more religious than many other people his good works outweighed his bad. And on that basis he felt that he met God's standard of righteousness and therefore heaven would be his reward.

“And since he was also convinced that because his life went so well, God must have been pleased with him, but he never realized that the goodness of God was intended to woo him to repentance and genuine faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He trusted in himself, not the righteousness of Christ. He lived for himself, not of the glory of God. He submitted to his own religious traditions not the lordship of Jesus Christ as revealed in Scripture.

“So for this reason our friend and loved one has fallen into the category of the religiously damned whom Jesus warned he would one day sentence and say, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’<sup>1</sup>”

No. We never hear that at funerals, do we? Somehow everyone makes the cut in our culture, even those with a reputation for being a scoundrel. As long as a person has had some kind of a religious experience or religious affiliation or even if they haven't, if they have been a good person, better than most, then the kingdom is theirs.

Haven't we all heard people say, “Well, I am sure that I am going to heaven because I am good Jew or I am a good Muslim or I am a good Catholic or a good Christian or a good Mormon or a good Mason or just a good person”?

I have heard it 1000 times and you probably have as well. But, dear friends, this is precisely the kind of person that Paul addresses in the first 16 verses of Romans two. Here he speaks to the religious moralist, a person who is convinced of his own goodness, the person who believes that he has no need for a righteousness that exceeds his own, the type of person—as we might put it—that believes that God grades on the curve. And

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 7:23.

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since he believes he is better than most, he is certain that he will pass the test and meet God's standard for holiness.

You know, even as believers we are masters at deceiving ourselves when it comes to self evaluation, aren't we? We are hopelessly biased in our own favor, perceiving ourselves to be far more like Christ than we truly are. And how thankful I am that when God looks at me he sees the righteousness of Christ and not the righteousness of Dave Harrell.

Now remember by way of context that beginning in chapter one verse 18 all the way through chapter three and verse 20 Paul is focusing on why the gospel of God is such incredibly good news. And the reason is because every man is a sinner, every man therefore stands in condemnation before an infinitely and holy righteous God. Every person is in need of the righteousness of Christ because "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."<sup>2</sup>

Think of it this way. Imagine that the holiness of God requires that you be able to jump across the Grand Canyon. So we all come up to the Grand Canyon and we all give it our very best. Some of you will jump further than others. But the reality is none of us will be able to make it across. And, dear friends, the chasm between God's holiness and our sinfulness is infinitely greater than the Grand Canyon. We need a supernatural Savior to deliver us to the other side.

Now in chapter one Paul exposed the wickedness of the pagans who reject God's revelation of himself through creation and through conscience and he delineates that tragic progression of sin that inevitably follows.

And now in the first 16 verses of chapter two Paul is going to expose the moral religious person who is prone to condemn others who he believes are less righteous than he. And he is especially focusing on his kinsmen the Jews who had convinced themselves that because of their religious works and because of their heritage as God's chosen people that somehow they were better in God's eyes than the pagans and therefore they were not subject to God's condemnation.

My what a lie that is.

Now having said that, follow along as I read chapter two verses one through 16. And this morning we will just focus on the first five verses.

Therefore you are without excuse, every man of you who passes judgment, for in that you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. And do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment upon those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and

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<sup>2</sup> Romans 3:23.

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forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But 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, who WILL RENDER TO EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to every man who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God. For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law; and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law; for not the hearers of the Law are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified. For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.<sup>3</sup>

Here we see three reasons why even the moralist is under divine condemnation. First of all, because of their self righteous judgment; secondly, because of their self satisfied disregard for grace; and, finally, because of their self seeking works. And this morning we are going to focus on the first two, their self righteous judgment and their self satisfied disregard for grace.

Notice verse one as Paul begins his argument here regarding their condemnation because of self righteous judgment.

He says, “Therefore...”

In other words, Paul is saying, “Having established in the preceding verses that the idolatrous immoral practices of the Gentiles are so offensive to God that he would actually abandon them to the consequences of their iniquities, therefore, you, too, are without excuse. You who condemn others, you who are so religious and so moral, you, too, have rejected God’s revelation of himself. You, too, love your sin more than the truth.”

And so he says, “Therefore,” in light of all of that, “you are without excuse, every man of you who passes judgment, for in that you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.”<sup>4</sup>

Now I am sure you can hear the religious moralist speak up very quickly and argue, “But

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<sup>3</sup> Romans 2:1-16.

<sup>4</sup> Romans 2:1.

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wait a minute. I don't worship idols. I don't practice immorality like the pagans. In fact, very few of the sins that the apostle mentioned are part of my life."

Ah, but herein is the purpose of Paul's argument. Because, you see, what the moralist fails to see is that he commits many of the same sins in his heart. He fails to see the depths of his own depravity because of his self deception, a self deception that is proven by his skewed evaluation of his own spiritual superiority and his hypocritical judgment of others.

The moralist is much like the rich young ruler, you will recall, in Luke 18. You remember Jesus confronted him with a list of commandments from the law and the young man said, "All these things I have kept from my youth."<sup>5</sup>

But Jesus knew better. In fact, Jesus said, "One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess, and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."<sup>6</sup>

Well, you will recall the story. The young man couldn't do that. Jesus knew it.

Why couldn't he do it? Why couldn't he do what Jesus asked? And the answer is because he was an idolater. He worshiped wealth. He loved material things more than Christ. And now that idol was ruling him with an iron fist. Therefore Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."<sup>7</sup>

You see, all through Scripture we see that man even at his very best is woefully, woefully short of God's standard of holiness.

The prophet Isaiah tells us in Isaiah 64 and verse six, "For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment."<sup>8</sup>

And therefore Paul tells us at verse one, "Therefore you are without excuse, every man of you who passes judgment, for in that you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things."<sup>9</sup>

You will recall Jesus warned the self sanctified Jews about this very thing, the Jews that were blinded because of their own self righteous hypocrisy.

In Matthew seven verse one here is what Jesus said.

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<sup>5</sup> Luke 18:21.

<sup>6</sup> Luke 18:22.

<sup>7</sup> Luke 18:23-24.

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah 64:6.

<sup>9</sup> Romans 2:1.

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Do not judge lest you be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.

"And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."<sup>10</sup>

Now may I remind you that Jesus is not saying that we are to never judge as some erroneously teach. I remember when the Promise Keeper's movement was in full force. Most of that fad has now drifted away, but you will probably recall it. Many thousands of the men were given a little stone that they were to keep in their pocket and they were to pull that stone out whenever they were tempted to judge or criticize another person. And, of course, they based that on a misapplication of John eight. You will remember the woman who was caught in adultery and Jesus said, "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone."<sup>11</sup>

Now, that kind of arm chair theology and voodoo exegesis is so misleading and yet it is so common in our evangelical culture. Obviously we are to be discerning. In fact, Jesus said in John 7:24 we are to "judge with righteous judgment."<sup>12</sup>

Titus 3: 10 says we are to "Reject a factious man after a first and second warning."<sup>13</sup>

In 1 Corinthians five verses 11 through 12 we are told that we are not to even associate with phony Christians living in sin, but we are to judge those who are in the Church who claim to be believers yet whose lives speak otherwise.

In fact, even in Matthew seven and verse 16 Jesus said, "You will know them by their fruits."<sup>14</sup>

In other words that is the standard. See, the issue is not judging, but rather the motive and the standard that we use to judge. We are commanded to judge others, but with humility and compassion according to God's standard of righteousness, not our own.

So, indeed, Jesus' warning in Matthew seven against hyper critical and hypocritical judgment goes to the very heart of Paul's argument. He is speaking here primarily to the Jews. He is saying, "Dear kinsmen, every man is under condemnation no matter how moral or how religious he might be, because every man who has not bowed the knee to Christ in repentant faith is an idolater who either worships some ridiculous idol or worships himself.

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<sup>10</sup> Matthew 7:1-5.

<sup>11</sup> John 8:7.

<sup>12</sup> John 7:24.

<sup>13</sup> Titus 3:10.

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 7:16.

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And while you may not sin outwardly, you sin inwardly. You commit sin in your heart. And therefore that inward sin that you commit in secret, in the secret caverns of your imagination deals a death blow to your self righteousness.

In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew five you will remember that he indicted the proud and scribes and Pharisees who were legendary in their fastidious keeping of the law and he said, "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven."<sup>15</sup>

And then you will remember that he went on to explain that although you may not sin outwardly, you sin inwardly and therefore you are guilty. Remember the example that he used. He says that you are told not to commit murder and people don't do that. Not every body does that, at least outwardly. But he went on to tell them in essence that the law prohibits the heart attitudes of anger and hatred that lead to abusive speech and murder. And so if you have had that in your heart, you are guilty.

He also said, "You shall not commit adultery, but," he says, "I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Dear friends, it is absolutely impossible for us to even fathom how far God's standard of righteousness is from our own.

You will remember that Jesus declared in Matthew 5:48 that "You are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."<sup>16</sup>

That is the standard.

In Isaiah 55 and verse eight the Lord says:

For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,"  
declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are  
My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts.<sup>17</sup>

So Paul continues his line of reasoning in verse two. And he says, "And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things."<sup>18</sup>

In other words, he is saying in particular, "We as Jews who have been exposed to the truth of the divine standard, we sufficiently understand what God is saying and we have discernment concerning the wickedness of the Gentile idolaters."

And he goes on in verse three and he says, "And do you suppose this?"<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Mathew 5:20.

<sup>16</sup> Matthew 5:48.

<sup>17</sup> Isaiah 55:8-9.

<sup>18</sup> Romans 2:2.

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Let me pause for a minute. The word “suppose” is very important, λογίζομαι (log-id’-zom-ahee) in the original language. We get our word, our English word logic from that. And it basically means to think. It means to reason or to calculate based upon logic.

And so what Paul is saying is do you calculate, do you reason this, oh man, that when you pass judgment upon those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? It is as if he is saying, “Come on. Do you really think that?”

He is saying, “My fellow Jews, how often we have bragged about the fact that we have been the custodians of the law of God. We have bragged about being his chosen people as if this were enough to not only help us discern the wickedness of the Gentile idolaters, but also somehow excuse us from judgment.”

But, in truth, it is for these very reasons that we are all the more guilty. We are all the more guilty because we know what God requires and yet we do not obey. What distorted justice we administer to ourselves.

How is it that we can repeatedly commit certain life dominating sins and still pass judgment on others? Why do we do that? And the answer is because we measure our sin according to our own standard of judgment. Therefore, we don’t look so bad, especially compared to others.

We use what you might call a self righteous scale of judgment. You have seen the scales, the legal system different places where we go. They weigh things. But the scale that we use to measure our own righteousness are secretly weighted to our advantage.

It always somehow tilts in our favor. Maybe another way of looking at it is we have ways of cooking our own books, all right? And the Jews tended to do this. In fact, the Jews saw the law as detached commands where you could kind of obey some as long as you offset your disobedience by obeying others, you see, it is that type of thing, sort of a debit and credit system. As long as you have a positive balance, then you are ok with God.

And, of course, this is at the heart of every works righteousness, this is at the heart of Legalism, isn’t it, that human performance is necessary to somehow gain divine favor. And then everybody has got their lists.

But, you see, the great deception is that man perceives his moral standing before God to be dependent upon himself rather than the perfect imputed righteousness of Christ. See, again, Christ should be the center of the gospel, not man. The gospel is not about our obedience. The gospel is about the doing and the dying and the rising again of the Son of Man.

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<sup>19</sup> Romans 2:3.

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Let me show you how we cook the books at times as Christians. Take the wife who knows she has a reputation for being a control freak that hen pecks her husband. Get the picture?

Now, guys, don't be elbowing your wife here. She knows that she refuses to submit to his authority, drives everybody nuts with her condescending arrogance. The kids are out of control. She has a reputation for being divisive within the church. She knows in her heart that she has no deep reverence for God and she really enjoys know fellowship with him or with other believers. She knows that she has really no prayer life, no real appetite for Scripture, but all of that is ok and here is why. Because I teach Sunday school, because I sing in the choir, I take meals to shut ins. I don't cheat on my husband or my income tax and I give to the church.

That is how we think.

Or take the young man who claims to be a Christian. Yet if you look at his life he is rude and condescending and disobedient to his parents. You look on his Facebook page and you see that he posts all manner of arrogant, angry and worldly garbage. He brags about his own abilities. He is a legend in his own mind. He condemns and slanders others who don't see things the way he does. He likes to drop a few vulgar words in there every now in there every now and again to kind of prove what a tough guy he is. And he likes to write with flowery rhetoric to somehow impress people with his literary genius.

But down deep he knows that he really has no fear of God. He loves pornography more than purity. He has no devotion to the glory of God. He enjoys no communion with the God he claims to serve. He really doesn't even know much about this God. He has no love for the Word of God. He has no zeal for evangelism, no love for the lost. But all of that is ok. Why? Because he goes to church pretty often. He even attends the youth group. He has been baptized. And he also listens to Christian music every now and then.

And then on top of all of that he doesn't smoke pot. So somehow in his mind he is ok. Plus he looks and he says, "You know, it is interesting. God doesn't seem to be judging people who are far more wicked than I am. So I can't be that bad. I guess I am ok."

You see, beloved, this is the wickedness of self righteous judgment. And since most people are sufficiently fooled by our spiritual façade, by our self righteous garment kind of that church look that we have, we become more emboldened in our hypocrisy to the point where we assume that God sees us the way we see ourselves and the way we have tricked others into seeing us.

Dear friends, don't live a lie. Who you are in secret is who you are. And even at that only God can fully know who we are.



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You might recall Paul had no confidence in his own evaluation of himself. And though he couldn't see any blatant unconfessed sin in his life, he said in 1 Corinthians four and verse three, "I am not by this acquitted, but the one who examines me is the Lord."<sup>20</sup>

You know, if you have to worship the Lord, to serve or obey Christ, if you have no longing to be like Christ and to glorify God, if you have a life that is characterized by selfish ambition and pride and hypocrisy and a lack of love for others you cannot be saved regardless of what you claim.

Jesus said in John 15:8 we will prove to be his disciples if we what? "Bear much fruit."<sup>21</sup>

John wrote the same truth in 1 John 3:7.

"Little children, let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil."<sup>22</sup>

So, dear friends, I would exhort you to be brutally honest with yourself and examine your life according to God's standard and not your own. And when you do, you will discover that your sin is so great that apart from the righteousness of Christ imputed and imparted to you by a gracious God, you would never ever be able to enter into the presence of our holy God. And because of that, your heart will be so overjoyed with thanksgiving that that will motivate you to be obedient. And you won't do it out of duty, but you will do it out of desire and, thus, bear much fruit.

John MacArthur put it so well as he often does. Let me read this to you. Quote, "The secret hope of the hypocrite is that God will some how judge him by a standard lower than perfect truth and righteousness. He knows enough to recognize the wickedness of his heart, but he hopes vainly that God will judge him in the same superficial way that most others judge him and that he judges himself. He plays a kind of religious charade, wanting to be judged by his appearance rather than by his true character. And because most men accept him for what he pretends to be—as most hypocrites—he assumes God will do the same. But as God cautioned Samuel in 1 Samuel 16:7, quote, 'Do not look at his appearance,' referring to Eliab's appearance, 'or at the height of his stature,'<sup>23</sup> he went on to say, ' for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.'<sup>24</sup>

So Paul begins with the condemnation of the self righteous moralist who judges others. They are also without excuse. And, secondly, there is a condemnation because of their self satisfied disregard for grace in verses four and five.

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<sup>20</sup> 1 Corinthians 4:4.

<sup>21</sup> John 15:8.

<sup>22</sup> 1 John 3:7-8.

<sup>23</sup> 1 Samuel 16:7.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

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He goes on to say, “ Or do you think lightly...”<sup>25</sup> *katafroneo* (kat-af-ron-eh’-o) in the original language, an interesting term. It means to think little or to think nothing of something. It is the idea of undervaluing something or disregarding something.

So you might interpret it this way. “Or do you think [little or nothing] of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?”<sup>26</sup>

In other words, as you look at the kindness of God his goodness to us and his forbearance which has the idea of toleration. In fact, it carries the idea of restraint, of withholding judgment. And as we look at his patience which is a term that can be translated longsuffering, his slowness in avenging wrongs. In fact, this term was used to describe the mercy of a monarch who would choose to withhold punishment to a deserving enemy or a criminal.

So here the apostle exposes the false security of the religious moralist and the Jews in particular in this context who assumed that although they knew that they frequently lived in sin, especially in their heart, that since God did not abandon them to sordid immorality like Paul described in the first chapter and since they could see no blatant judgment of God in their own lives, he must therefore be satisfied with our spiritual condition.

Now it is important for you to understand a little bit about Jewish theology. As God’s covenant people they had seen in the past that they had been recipients of divine blessing and they had kind of this attitude that nothing bad will ever befall us because we are kind of the special superior people. We are the divine darlings. We are God’s pet people. And therefore if a Jew, for example, had any kind of a birth defect or a disease, that was considered to be something symptomatic of sin and that that person was somehow under divine judgment, that somehow that person was exceptionally sinful.

You will recall in John nine Jesus passed by the blind man from birth.

“And His disciples asked Him, saying, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?’”<sup>27</sup>

You see, that was the attitude that they had.

So if anything bad happened to a Jew it resulted in great confusion because they automatically assumed their innocence. Certainly this cannot be God’s judgment upon us. Look who we are.

Now with that type of an attitude, this is how they would tend to think and many of us tend to think. As long as life is going well, God is satisfied. I am good.

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<sup>25</sup> Romans 2:4.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> John 9:2.

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Many religious people think that today. As long as life is going good, I don't need to make any changes. After all, I am not as bad as many others. I go to church. I am morally better than most. My sins are not all that serious, so I am good with God.

The attitude that basically says, "If I am happy, God must be happy."

That is the American dream, isn't it? But that kind of attitude is all together wrong. What Paul wants the reader to hear is that the reason why God is so rich in his kindness and forbearance and patience is not because your righteousness is so pleasing to him, that because he is extending mercy to you that you will come to your senses and repent.

You see, this is what we call common grace. This is the grace of God by which he lavishes countless blessings upon all people, none of which are a part of saving grace, by the way. Because, you see, the wages of sin is death, not life. We should have all died the first time we violated the law, right? But instead every person who lives experiences God's grace.

We see this, for example, in the physical realm in Matthew 5:45. We read, "For He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."<sup>28</sup>

And in Acts 14 verse 16 Paul tells the people of Lystra:

And in the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.<sup>29</sup>

We see God's common grace not only in the physical realm, but also in the intellectual realm. Think about it. The Word of God tells us that Satan is the god of this world. We are told that although he is a liar and the father of lies and there is no truth in him and although the whole world lies in the power of the evil one, still even the pagans are able to see some truth. Even people apart from Christ can think rationally. They are not totally given over to lying as their father the devil. So we see God's common grace there.

In fact, everything we enjoy from science, technology is a result of common grace. We see God's common grace in the moral realm. Think about it. Even though unbelievers are dead in their sins they have no capacity to understand the Word of God and apply it. Nevertheless there is a sense in which they know the truth intuitively. We see that in Romans 2:15 that "The Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Matthew 5:45.

<sup>29</sup> Acts 14:16-17.

<sup>30</sup> Romans 2:15.

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So even sinful people can do good to others.

We see God's common grace demonstrated as he warns the world of final judgment. Think about it. He created a moral order to his universe whereby there is a built in law of sowing and reaping and he gives people a sense of the normal consequences of what we do, both good and bad. All of that is a merciful warning that we must one day give an account to a holy God on the day of judgment.

But Paul's point in verse four is simply this. Don't mistake God's common grace for saving grace. Instead realize that such kindness, such forbearance, such patience should lead you to repentance, because those who refuse the gospel of grace, punishment is not forgotten. It is just delayed.

2 Peter 3:9 we read that, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."<sup>31</sup>

You know, many people fail to see God's kindness and forbearance and patience. Think of the unbeliever's response and even the naïve Christian's response when some great tragedy occurs in life. The first word that comes out of many people's mouth is the word why.

Why did God allow all these innocent people to perish in 9/11?

Why did God allow my loved one to suffer and die?

Why did God take my son in his prime?

As if the Creator owes the creature an explanation and as if we could comprehend it were he to do so.

You see, this kind of questioning presupposes pride, one that, frankly, impugns the character of God, that basically accuses him of being both unfair and unkind, that somehow we deserve better.

You see, the real question is not why do bad things happen to good people, but why do good things ever happen to people who deserve far worse? God made it clear from the beginning that all sin is a capital offense, worthy of death.

Remember he warned Adam in Genesis 2:16, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> 2 Peter 3:9.

<sup>32</sup> Genesis 2:16-17.

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Well, what happened? They disobeyed. But they lived, right? They disobeyed, but they lived. Why? Because God is kind, because he is forbearing, because he is patient. That is why.

Think about it. Out of all of the laws in the Mosaic law, it is interesting that God only attached the death penalty to 35. Now many people will look at that and say, “My, what a cruel God.”

I mean, one of the laws, for example, if you were a young person and you hit your parent that was worthy of the death penalty. My, what a cruel God.

But, you know, he could have made them all a capital offense. But he didn't because of his mercy. Better yet, Jesus came later and fulfilled the law. He fulfilled it perfectly and died on our behalf and this is the amazing grace of the gospel. But, you know, the naïve and the arrogant view all tragedies as a mark against God.

Not too long ago an unsaved friend lost her husband and she very angrily would grit her teeth and say over and over again as she continues to do, “How could God take my husband? Why would he allow him to die? I prayed and I prayed and I prayed and he never answered my prayer. I want nothing to do with that kind of a God.”

Compare that to another situation I was involved with where a Christian couple lost two of their teenage children in a car accident and yet God spared another of the teenage people that were in the car, a young man. And the father said this. This is a paraphrase.

Quote, “I am so glad we had the years that we did with our children. We will see them again one day and we are thankful that he spared the other young man rather than our own children because, you see, our children knew and loved Christ, but he doesn't know the Lord. And now through the forbearance of God he has more time to repent.”

Do you see the difference?

You know, sometimes for reasons known only to the Lord death comes quickly to people. For others it comes much later in life. But the reality is we all die. Sometimes he punishes sin immediately and dramatically.

Remember Lot's wife? Don't look back. She looked back. Pillar of salt. Bam.

Other times he allows people to live. David had his adulterous affair with Bathsheba, killed her husband. But because of God's grace he allowed him to live. Some will read the Scripture and shake their fist at God for different stories. I can remember how God sent the bear to kill 40 children who were mocking the prophet Elisha. Or they will condemn God for telling the Israelites to go into the land of Canaan and utterly exterminate all of the people because of their wickedness.

## Condemnation for the Self-Righteous Moralist – Part 1

Romans 2:1-5

But they will give no thought to the countless billions of people that he has spared over the years because of his common grace that they might come to repentance.

Think of the vastness of God's mercy when before the flood he allowed billions of vile sinners to hear the warning from his servant Noah for 120 years. That is grace. But because of ignorance and pride most people only see the judgment.

Have we not all sinned more grievously than Ananias and Sapphira? Should we not all be struck dead like them? Why are we spared? Because of God's kindness, because of his forbearance, his patience.

And why did he kill them? The answer is simple. To remind us all of what we deserve. And just because things are going well in life, don't assume that God is well satisfied with your spiritual condition. But rather examine your heart and rejoice in his kindness.

But to the self satisfied moralist who disregards God's grace and refuses the conversion that God seeks to offer him, to the man who lives under the delusion that because his life is going well and others are suffering that somehow he is spiritually superior and therefore justified in his condemnation of others. Paul says this in verse five.

“But 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.”<sup>33</sup>

Stubbornness, again, an interesting word, *sklhrothv* (sklay-rot'-ace) in the original language. We get our word “scleroderma” and “sclerosis” from that. It means hardness, a hardening of certain organs, for example, that would cause them to malfunction. And here it speaks of the spiritual hardening of the heart, a heart that comes or a heart that manifests a hardness, a stubborn refusal to acknowledge sin and respond in humble faith to the gospel of grace.

You see, the hard hearted man will presume upon God's grace to the point where he takes it for granted. That is the point. Rather than recognizing the forbearance of God, whereby the Lord is merely suspending punishment that he might come to repentance and so this man, Paul says, stores up wrath. Literally he is piling it up. He is increasing it for himself “ in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.”<sup>34</sup>

That is referring to the final judgment, that great white throne judgment when God will cast the wicked into the lake of fire and brimstone as we read in Revelation 20 and verse 10 where they will be tormented day and night forever.

In delaying God's punishment—and we close with these thoughts—dear friends, God gives evidence of his mercy, of his goodness and his love. And think about it. Some of you were raised in a Christian home where Christ was worshipped where his Word was

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<sup>33</sup> Romans 2:5.

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## Condemnation for the Self-Righteous Moralist – Part 1

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read and honored. Some of you can probably in your mind's eye see you going to church with your parents. You remember them explaining the gospel to you. You may remember them praying with you, maybe even pleading with you to come to Christ. And yet now for some of you your parents look upon you with great sorrow because of what you have become. They mourn so deeply that had they known what you would end up being like, they would have rather you never be born because they know your great rebellion against God and they know the horrors of hell that awaits you unless you repent.

But, dear friend, if that is you, or if you are some other religious moralist that think that somehow you have made the cut for all the reasons that I have described, please know that you will never make the standard of God's righteousness apart from Christ. And the good news is this. The opportunity is still available. The door is still open. The forbearance of God is still at work.

I ask you. How long will you spurn the riches of his kindness and his forbearance and his patience? How long? So you need to think of it this way. God has dealt so kindly with you while you have lived in such rebellion. Does this not give evidence to the fact that he desires for you to come to repentance, forgiveness?

Of course it does. So please know that God invites you today to come to him and in repentance and humble faith before it is too late.

*Father, thank you for these eternal truths and I pray that those who do not know you will stop spurning your grace and no longer look upon themselves as superior to others, as worthy of your grace, but rather fall upon their face at the foot of the cross and plead of the forgiveness, the mercy that you long for them to embrace. I pray in Christ's name. Amen.*

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