



## **Morality is No Excuse**

Romans 2:1-4

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We'll be looking this morning at the second chapter of Romans, specifically at the first four verses. Please give attention to the reading of God's Holy Word. For the Word of the Lord is completely inerrant, the Word of the Lord is completely authoritative, and the Word of the Lord is completely sufficient. Romans, chapter 2.

*"Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?"*

Thus far the reading of God's Holy Word. Let's pray for his blessing upon it. O Lord our God, we ask that you would open up your Word to us, that by the power of your Holy Spirit you would illumine our minds, that you would make our hearts soft for your Word, that it might be implanted and bear much fruit. We ask most of all, Lord, that by the power of your Word and your Spirit you would make us more and more into the image of your Son, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is in Christ's precious name we pray, amen.

We are moving now this morning into a new section of the book of Romans, chapter 2. You should know chapter numbers and even verse numbers are not inspired by the Holy Spirit. They're not original with the writing of the Bible. They came several centuries later. At the same time, chapter divisions and even verse divisions are helpful to us, because it helps to highlight for us what is in the text itself that is a breakdown of the content of the text.

In the case of the book of Romans, we have a letter written by Paul, which is a single cohesive argument, and he moves from one point to the other. As we move to chapter 2, remember the context of Paul's purpose here. The purpose of Paul's letter to the Romans is to share the good news of the gospel, to tell the Romans and, by extension, you and me that Jesus Christ lived and died so sinners would be forgiven and restored to a relationship with God.

Of course, as Paul lays out this argument, the very first hurdle he has to overcome is from those who say, "Well, I'm not a sinner. I don't need Jesus." Because of that, Paul starts out this book confronting sin. He says everyone knows God, but they fail to worship God. They fail to honor him. In short, he says everyone is an idolater. He then begins to show what this rebellion against God looks like. It looks like a denial of the natural order of things, an obvious sin of unnatural lusts.

Then he goes on to say this is not the *only* sin. As a matter of fact, he lists 21 other sins to make sure he gets our attention. This chapter 1 is directed primarily at those who are not religious, those who would not be in church. We might think of Paul's audience primarily in chapter 1 as Gentiles, those who are outside of the people who receive the Word of God.

Now, as Paul moves to chapter 2, he's going to address those who *do* understand God's law, who understand right and wrong, who make judgments about morality, who try to live their lives in a certain fashion, a very different way than those in chapter 1. In chapter 2, we're going to look at one of the excuses that is used for not coming to God. That is, "I live a moral life. I'm basically okay. I don't need God because I follow the rules."

This morning, I'd like us to see two main headings of Paul's text. First, we see *the judgment of the Lord*, the true and inescapable judgment of God. Secondly, we see *the longsuffering of the Lord*. The reason that judgment doesn't come immediately upon us is because the Lord is longsuffering. The judgment of the Lord and the longsuffering of the Lord.

### **The Judgment of the Lord**

Let's begin by looking at *God's judgment*. Paul has this argument he is building, and he has started it in chapter 1, laying out the sin of men before God, the way they fall short of the glory of God, and they do it in very obvious ways. We've said this before. We're going to keep seeing it. It's remarkable that Paul anticipates the objections that are about to be made.

If you are listening to Paul at the end of chapter 1 and saying to yourself, "But, Paul, I don't have that kind of obvious sin in my life. This doesn't describe me. Therefore, I must not be in rebellion against God, and the wrath of God isn't manifest on me because that doesn't look like me..." As a matter of fact, there are many people, perhaps you and me, even, who are cheering Paul on in chapter 1.

"That's it. Go get 'em, Paul. That's the kind of sin we need to get rid of. If we can only get these kinds of people out of our churches, out of our communities, things will be good again. Don't these people know they should live more like me? Shouldn't they be watching me to figure out what they should do to live before God?" Paul says once again, "Well, I'm glad you've asked that question." The answer is, "Therefore you have no excuse."

He starts with this strong conclusion in verse 1 of chapter 2, "Therefore..." We've seen this word before. It's the same word that begins verse 24 of chapter 1. "Therefore God gave them up to the lusts of their hearts." Paul was building his argument. He was saying everyone knows God. They suppress the knowledge of God; therefore, because of that, God gives them over.

Paul does something interesting here. He starts with his conclusion. The *therefore* is not about the actions at the end of chapter 1. The *therefore* is actually about the actions of chapter 2, verses 1-3. Paul is so certain about this and he so wants to get our attention he starts with his conclusion. He's shocking us up out of our daydream or perhaps, better yet, out of our self-congratulation, as we say to ourselves, "I'm so glad I'm not like those sinners." He does this intentionally.

He says there is no excuse for those who judge the sin of others. He says, "You have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges." Why is this? Well, first, we must understand if someone judges someone else, they are acknowledging there is a standard of conduct and action. After all, how would you judge something unless there's a standard to judge it against? These are the kinds of people who do *not* believe anything goes, but what they fail to do in their judgment is to look in a mirror.

What Paul is doing is calling them out for their hypocrisy. He's saying they are living outwardly moral lives, and that allows them to judge others or, better yet, to feel justified in judging others. Just because we live lives that look good before other people doesn't mean we live lives that are right before God, because God is the searcher of hearts. God knows all things. The things we do in secret, the things we speak under our breath, the things we even think God knows.

So the very fact that someone judges and condemns sin in someone else, acknowledging that sin is real and that it exists, does not relieve you from being judged yourself. Actually, Paul says, you are condemning yourself. "For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself," Paul says. He uses an even stronger form of the word *to judge*. The word for *to condemn* has at its root to judge someone, but it is taken up a couple of notches, because when you judge them you judge them in a negative way. You pronounce them guilty. You condemn.

The moral, those who believe they are living moral lives, who are trusting in that, are condemning themselves by their judgments of others, because what Paul says is they practice the very same things. Paul wants our attention here. He actually begins that clause with the words *the same things*. It's as if he wants us to realize, "You have the same thing in *your* life that you criticize and judge other people for. *Your* lives are marked by sin also. You practice these things."

The tense of this verb is a present-tense verb. It is not something you did in the past. It's something you're doing right now. Don't pretend you're not, and don't try and excuse your sin just by looking at others' sin. Paul is saying to us that just because others sin, even sin in an obvious way, that does not excuse our own sin. Paul says the judgment of God is honest. It's not hypocritical.

We don't get to excuse the sin in ourselves that we judge in others. Our Lord Jesus Christ puts it this way in Matthew, chapter 7: "For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you." There is one standard, and if we acknowledge that there is a standard we must look at our own lives even more closely than the lives of others.

The next obvious question that comes up, then, is, "Paul, what do you mean I do the same things?" There's a good argument to be made here. Someone might say to Paul, "Paul, I'm a moral person. I don't define my life by unnatural lusts. I haven't murdered anyone. I haven't attacked my parents. I'm not ruthless to other people. All of these things you're talking about, Paul, I don't do. What do you mean I'm like them?"

What we have to understand is Paul is not saying you have committed the exact same actions as these others. He's saying you do the same things; namely, sin. Just as *they* sin, *you* sin. It may look different. It may be internal instead of external. It may be something you're better at hiding. It may be something you use under your breath or in the dark or when no one is around, but you still are guilty of sinning.

Paul tells us this because there is a blindness that comes over the eyes of people when they look at others' sins. When we look at other people's sins, we then become blind to our own. It's kind of like this. Have you ever had the experience of going out on a beautiful sunny day like today and looking up into the sky? Maybe it's because you heard an airplane go by or someone yelled, "Hey, a balloon!" or maybe you just wanted to see the clouds.

You look up and spend an inordinate amount of time, maybe 20 or 30 seconds, looking up, and you get too much sun in your eyes. Then you look away from the sky, and what do you see? Nothing. Right? Because you see sun spots. All you see is the effect of the sun. You look around and can't see things. As a matter of fact, if you look *too* long, you lose your ability to see around you in a permanent way.

That is a picture of what it's like when we fix our gaze on other people's sins. We become enamored with finding sin in others, and then when we come to look at our *own* lives we're unable to see our own sins. We're unable to repent ourselves. God doesn't have this kind of blindness. No, Paul says the judgment of God is true. He says it rightly falls on those who practice these things.

God's judgment is, the Greek says, according to truth. That's what *rightly falls* means. God judges according to truth itself, not according to what we want, not according to what we think. He doesn't excuse some sinners because they agree with him about certain sins. No. God judges truly, but sinners tend to be blind to the nature of sin.

Those who are self-righteous in their morality look at the sin of others and think that's all sin is, that murder is only shooting someone and killing them, that stealing is only robbing a bank, that lying is only the intentional complete telling of an untruth. This allows us to make an excuse for ourselves. We say, "Well, we have every right to hate that person." "We don't steal things; we just borrow things, and maybe we forget to give them back."

"We only take things the company can afford to lose. After all, they have a lot of these things lying around. It's not like anybody really cares if I take them." "We don't lie; we just stretch the truth. What a world of

difference that is." Jesus has told us how we are to look at God and his law. He says we are to be wide and broad in its application to us.

This is the exact problem with the Pharisees. In the New Testament, the Pharisees thought they could define God's law, and they just happened to define God's law in a way that fenced it so that everything *they* did was on the other side of the fence. They just happened to define God's law so they never committed a sin. They defined away sin.

That's what Paul is warning you and me against: having a view that's quick to condemn others and quick to excuse ourselves. Jesus tells us we have to take a hard look at ourselves. It's not just killing that's a sin; it's anger. It's not just breaking into someone's home and stealing from them. No, it's robbing time your employer is paying you for to surf Facebook. It's not just telling untruths, but it's failing to uphold the truth. We have to understand our own sin.

Paul says to us that we cannot divert God's attention away from our sin simply by pointing out others' sins. We see this all the time in our homes. I'm sure parents are aware of this. Kids, lest you think it's just you, I'm sure your parents did this when *they* were your age. It's when Mom and Dad come and confront one of the children and say, "You've done something you shouldn't have done; you've been disobedient," and the child says, "But did you see what *she* did? Did you see what my brother did?" Trying to deflect, trying to take the focus off of themselves and put it on someone else.

We hope what we have is something really juicy to point out. "I may have not finished my dinner and thrown away my dinner, but did you see the mess her room is? It's a disaster. Go punish *her*. Go after *her*." If we're not careful, that's how we can live our lives. We become experts at pointing out the sins of others, and we're blind to our own. The problem with that is it doesn't change what we have done to simply misdirect God's judgment. It doesn't do away with the guilt we have for our own sins.

Sinners are blind to their own sin, and it's also a failure to see in our own lives what we see in others. I can think of no better example of this than from the pages of Scripture itself. Do you remember the story of David and Nathan? Nathan came to David and said, "Let me tell you a story. There is a man, and this man has flocks and flocks of sheep. Then there's another man who has one little lamb. He feeds this lamb from his dinner table, and he takes care of this lamb and loves this lamb. The man who had flocks and flocks and flocks took the one lamb away from the second man and used it."

David says, "Bring the man here now. He shall not live out the day." David absolutely understands the sinfulness of that. What does Nathan say? "*You* are the man. This is exactly what you've done except it's not with a lamb; it's with a man's wife. Do you not see that the sin you have seen in others is in your own life?" If this can happen to David, God's anointed king, a man after his own heart, a writer of the Bible, how can we think we are invulnerable to this? We're not. God's judgment is just.

If you're sitting here this morning and you think you don't need to confess sin, if you think this morning you don't really need Jesus because there are dozens and dozens of people who are worse than you, then you are in a place of danger. What we have to do is take a hard look at ourselves, a harder look than we look at others. We must know God's judgment is true, it is just, and it doesn't bear any favoritism.

The next thing Paul tells us about God's judgment is that it is inescapable. He's emphatic in verse 3. He says, "Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God?" Paul starts and figuratively looks us right in our eyes. The very beginning of this verse is actually *you*. He's looking right at us, and he asks what we call a *probing question*.

If you've ever wondered why preachers do this, why they ask these kinds of questions that make you squirm a little bit about your life, this is why. The Bible does it. The Bible tells us this is how we root out sin in our lives. We have to be confronted with our sin. We don't just assume everything is fine. We have to be confronted with our sin so we can repent of it and flee it.

Paul says, "Can you possibly make the determination that God's judgment doesn't apply to you?" What Paul is doing is setting God's truth over against the assumptions of people. He says, "Are you reckoning, are you calculating that you won't be judged?" It's interesting that he uses the same word here (*suppose* in verse 3) that he'll use later in chapter 4 about how Abraham believed God and it was *reckoned* unto him for righteousness. It was *counted* to him as righteousness. It was *supposed*, to use our translation here, as righteousness.

Paul is saying here you are reckoning, you are counting, you are standing in judgment of yourself when it is God who is the Judge. What essentially we do in this instance is we substitute *our* judgment for God's. Paul is showing us how foolish this is. The moral person acknowledges there is a moral order. He says there *is* sin and sin *should* be punished...just punished in other people. Yet he actually does the same things.

When Paul says "You *do* the same things," that word is actually stronger than when he says others *practice* these things. You're involved in the same sorts of things. You are a sinner as well. Why would God excuse that in you? The judgment of the Lord is true; therefore, it is inescapable. There is no way to get away from the judgment of God.

### **The Long-Suffering of the Lord**

So why would someone think they could avoid God's judgment? Especially because God is talking about people who acknowledge morality and acknowledge sin. Why would some people think they can avoid judgment? Why does the moral sinner not think about the punishment of his own sin? Well, it may be because he doesn't think he *has* sin. We've seen this in the text, but I think there's something more than that. I think the so-called moral sinner presumes upon the patience of God.

He sees the longsuffering of God with him and believes that is approval rather than longsuffering or patience. What Paul is doing here in chapter 2 is speaking not exclusively but directly to the religious of his day, to the Jews, to those who have the Scriptures, to those who understand there is God's law, to those who know the Ten Commandments, to those who know they should not be committing the types of sins described in chapter 1.

In chapter 1 he's talking about the Gentiles, those who are involved in gross sin. They had no obedience to God's law. The Jews saw this, and because of this, they wanted to be nowhere near the Gentiles. It's interesting that in this time in Judaism there are really two names for the Gentiles among the Jews. They wouldn't call them the *Gentiles*. They either called them *dogs* or they literally called them *sinners*. That was their name for them. "Those are the sinners."

The Jews thought they were right before God, because they didn't go to such an extent of sin as the Gentiles and they knew God's law. The other thing that's involved with this is that they had received God's blessings. The entirety of their history was the blessing of God being poured out on them. Think about it. Abraham being called out of his country and brought to the Promised Land, the exodus where Israel is delivered from slavery and bondage, coming into the land and being victorious under Joshua, the reign of David the king, the building of the temple, their return from exile.

The entirety of their history is built upon the blessings they received from God. The problem is they had begun to confuse *why* they had received the blessings. Instead of seeing the blessings as God did, as the unmerited blessings and grace from God to them, the least of all nations, God tells us... Instead, they thought it was they who deserved the blessings. So the next step was to presume the goodness of God was a verification of their own goodness. They deserved the blessings. It was God's reward to them. They saw the goodness of God as evidence that they were not sinners, that they didn't need the grace of God.

So Paul challenges these so-called moral people, starting with the Jews but expanding beyond. He challenges them about their view of God's goodness. He says, "Do you take God's goodness as proof you're not a sinner? Do you think so little of God that you believe he owes you?" The language here is clear. When Paul says, "Do you presume...?" that word has the connotation of looking down on something, of treating something with contempt.

He's saying, "Do you look down on God and his goodness? Do you treat God's mercy with such contempt you think it's something you're owed?" This kind of presumption is very dangerous. It looks at the lack of a final judgment as evidence of our worth. The kindness that comes from God is not about our worth; it is about his mercy. We don't deserve the goodness and kindness of God. In fact, his kindness, his generosity, his goodness comes to us in Jesus.

This is exactly what Paul says in chapter 2 before he comes to that famous passage about how we are justified by faith and that that is not of works but rather is a gift of God. Before he comes to that, he says God is rich in mercy, and he shows this through the kindness he gives toward us in Christ Jesus. So this morning, do not think so lightly of God's mercy. It came at a great cost. It came at a cost of the blood of the Son of God, of the life of Jesus Christ. The riches of God's kindness are rooted not in what we do but in what Jesus did.

The second thing Paul reminds us about God's patience is that it is a forbearance. He says, "Do you presume the riches of his forbearance?" Now what is a *forbearance*? Some of you may know that before I was a pastor I was a lawyer. The main thing I practiced was something called *commercial finance*. That is, companies would borrow money from banks. When they did that, there would come times when the company wasn't able to pay the payments on the loan, so the bank would come to the company and work out a forbearance.

What a forbearance did not mean is "You don't owe us any money anymore. Go ahead. Take a vacation. Blow the money on what you want. The house is yours." No, that's not what they mean. What they mean is, "We're going to forbear on collecting it. You have to actually acknowledge that you owe it, and all we're going to do is put off the day of reckoning until a future time. You absolutely, positively still owe." This is God's forbearance to sinners. The fact that he does not bring judgment upon sinners immediately does not mean he is okay with their sin.

It is not a world of "I'm okay; you're okay." It is not a world where the failure to see the final judgment of God means there is no judgment at all. It is rather that God has put his wrath on hold, and he has done this because of his mercy, because of his grace. More yet, he has done this so we might realize our sin, that we might realize we are indebted to him, that we are naked before him, that we are judged before him, and so we might repent of our sin and run from it and run to Jesus.

Now if we misunderstand his patience, we are in great danger, because we'll think everything is fine. We think there's no need for repentance, no need for faith, no need for redemption. We could think Jesus is a crutch for other people who can't live their lives right like we do, but the Bible teaches us that God is patient and he forbears. He endures with our rebellion. He puts up with it. He is patient and tranquil for now, but that will not last forever.

Actually, the word for *patience* here means longsuffering or greatness of endurance. It tells us how great and merciful *God* is, not how good *we* are. Do not presume that God has to vindicate you because of who you are or what you have done. Do not presume on his patience forever. Today is the day to run to Jesus. Today is the day of salvation. Today is the day to deal with sin.

Finally, why is God so patient with sinners? Well, it's obvious people aren't that patient. We just saw a group of people at the beginning of chapter 2 have no patience with the people in chapter 1. We just saw that. Paul

has been describing this for us. There must be a reason for God's patience. It's not to overlook sin forever, because Paul is telling us this is specifically not the case.

This is how Paul ends this passage. He says, "Are you presuming on God's kindness and his patience because you don't know why he's doing that?" He says, "Let me tell you why God is patient. Let me tell you why God is kind. It's so that with this knowledge you can see your responsibility before God." He uses an interesting word here when he says "Not *knowing* these things." The word is actually the word *agnostic*. He says, "Are you agnostic about God's purposes?"

Oftentimes, we think of being agnostic as being a positive thing. It's not like being an atheist, bad and mean. It's noble and good. "I'm agnostic. I don't have enough evidence yet." Well, Paul turns that around here. He basically says, "Are you so foolish that you don't know and understand what God is saying to you? You don't know what God's purpose is." He says, "Let me clue you in to God's purpose."

God's patience is meant to lead you to repentance. That's why God is patient. God suffers so you might *not* suffer. He suffers by enduring with your rebellion, enduring with your sin, enduring with your arrogance against him, the Creator. He does this for his own purpose. It is his purpose to bring sinners to repentance and forgiveness in Christ.

So do not see your lack of judgment as a vindication of your actions. See this patience as God's loving, merciful reaching out to you in Christ. If God wanted to condemn all sinners he could have done it long ago. I have news for you. You don't deserve a second chance. What you deserve is to be born in hell for judgment upon your sin, but God in his mercy is patient. More than that, he has sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to show you the error of your ways so you won't compare yourself against other sinners but you will see the true standard, the true man, Jesus Christ.

More than that, Jesus died on the cross so you might truly escape the judgment of God. Not by trying to outrun it but by having the judgment of God satisfied, completed. That is your true hope. In his Word God warns us against false hope. He tells us he has given us true hope in Jesus. Give up comparing yourself today and find true hope in Jesus.