



## The Just Judge

Romans 2:5-11

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We will be looking this morning at Romans, chapter 2, specifically verses 5-11, as Paul continues his argument with respect to the universality of sin. Please give attention to the reading of God's Holy Word. For the Word of the Lord is completely without error, the Word of the Lord is completely sufficient, and the Word of the Lord is completely authoritative. Romans, chapter 2, beginning at verse 5:

*"But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality."*

Thus far the reading of God's Holy Word. Let's pray for his blessing upon it. Lord, we ask that you would use your Word this morning, that by the power of your Spirit you would enlighten our minds, renew our wills, soften our hearts, O Lord, that your Word may take deep root and bear fruit one hundredfold in our lives. This we ask in Christ's precious name, amen.

As we continue this morning in our journey through the book of Romans, we need to remember the overarching principle that Romans is about God's grace to sinners in Christ. Romans sets forth the power of the gospel, and the power of the gospel is that it is salvation for everyone who believes. The problem is that often people's first reaction to the gospel is, "I don't need that. I'm not that bad. Look at that guy over there. He's way worse than me. I don't need Jesus."

Paul has been showing us, beginning with chapter 1 and now here into chapter 2, the universality of sin, that everyone is a sinner. He started with the clear and obvious examples of wickedness done by those who reject God and who enjoy sin, and then he moved on into those who are so-called moral in their behavior, who see sin in others and judge it in others but presume upon the patience of God and assume that means they're fine before God.

The truth is God is patient in order to lead sinners to repentance. Now this morning, Paul is going to be pressing home the reality of judgment. He's going to be showing us the just Judge with whom every single person must deal. There's no exception for church members, no exception for an elder or a pastor, no exception for husbands or wives or children. Everyone must stand before the just Judge.

This morning, I'd like us to see three things from our text. First, we will see *the Judge's wrath*. Paul lays this out for us so we can understand what is before all of us. Secondly, we see *the two paths* that are set forth. There are only two paths upon which every single person goes. Thirdly and finally, we see *the Judge's judgment*, how the Judge judges himself. The Judge's wrath, the two paths, and the Judge's judgment.

## **The Judge's Wrath**

Let's begin by looking at *the Judge's wrath* that Paul says is being stored up even now. Look at verse 5. "But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed." Paul has previously been telling us about God's patience. God's patience is intended to melt the sinful heart, to bring about a change in the life of a sinner. Instead, what we are seeing now is hearts that are hardened by sin, oblivious to the danger they are in, oblivious to their need.

The sinner's heart is hard and unyielding, Paul says. When Paul uses this word *hard*, the best way for you to picture it in your mind's eye is to think about the most stubborn person you know. I won't ask you if that's you, but think about the most stubborn person you know, the kind of person who when faced with facts still says, "No, I don't believe it. I won't listen to that. I'm going to continue in the way I'm going. I'm right." That's what Paul means when he talks about the hard heart. It's the stubborn heart, and it is stubborn against God and his sovereignty.

These kinds of sinners Paul is talking about in chapter 2 acknowledge right and wrong, and they're able to judge others because of that, but they don't think God has the right to judge *them*. The truth is when we hear about a hard heart in the Bible where immediately we often go is to think of Pharaoh. He's, of course, famous in the Old Testament for having a hard heart and for God hardening his heart.

The problem with that is that allows us to say, "Well, I'm not Pharaoh. I'm not nearly as bad as *he* is. After all, I would have caught on by the third or fourth plague. There is no way God would have had to put 10 plagues on me. I would have figured that out. I'm not as bad as Pharaoh." The truth is when the Bible talks about a hard heart, it actually far more often is talking about the religious people of the time, those who are identified with God's people, those who are in the temple, in the synagogue, or, in our context, in the church.

Stephen calls the Israelites a *stiff-necked* people. It's the same word. Stiff necks, hard hearts...you get the idea. Unyielding, stubborn. Paul goes in Acts 19 and preaches in the synagogue, and the Jews do not believe on Jesus. We are told they are *stubborn* in their unbelief. Same word. Finally, you recall in Hebrews, chapter 3, those who wandered through the desert and were hard in their hearts and would not enter into the Promised Land. They would not enter into God's rest because they would not yield to God and obey him and trust him.

We are warned in chapter 4 of Hebrews not to harden our hearts like they did. Same word. You see, when Paul is talking about hard hearts, he's talking about people who think they're right with God because of what

they've done, yet they're not because they don't trust Jesus. The frightening thing here is that Paul is talking to religious people who know the truth of God. They just refuse to act on the truth. They refuse to live in accordance with the truth.

They're not just hard; they are impenitent, Paul says. When Paul says they are *impenitent*, it means more than that they have not repented. It means an implication that they are *beyond* repenting, that they are so far gone in their hardness of heart and their rejection of God and their self-satisfaction and self-righteousness they stop listening to God. They are beyond changing their mind, we might say.

Paul tells us what it means to live and not acknowledge your sin and trust in Jesus. He says what it looks like is storing up wrath. This is a very interesting phrase. You know it quite well, just in a different context. You may recall that in Matthew, chapter 6, Jesus tells us we are not to lay up treasures on earth but rather to lay up treasures in heaven where they don't rust or can't be stolen. It's the exact same phrase. It's often used in a context that is positive: storing up something, saving, preparing.

I know, for many of us, this has become a lost art in twenty-first century America. Saving is somehow something we don't do anymore, but I think we acknowledge that it's good, that it's good stewardship of funds, that we should be prepared for emergency, that we should have savings and ability stored up so we can be generous, so if someone has need or we wish to support a missionary or we want to support the mission of the church we can be generous because we've prepared.

Here Paul is using it in the opposite context, in a *negative* context. Think of it this way. It's like saving up and building a case against yourself. It's like the criminal who takes a detailed notebook of everything about his crimes and then hands it over to the chief investigator. It's like someone who's saving for the future by getting gold bars and putting them in a box and hiding them in the attic. Then one day, as they're asleep in their bed, the box crashes through the ceiling and crushes them and kills them, because they were storing up wrath for themselves.

Perhaps better yet to think of it this way. It's someone who thinks they're going to prepare for the future by storing up perishable food in their room. You can imagine what this looks like. It's not useful or helpful. It just draws filth and bugs and disease and death. It does the exact opposite of what you hoped it would do. That's what Paul is saying here. The reason this storing up is so dangerous is they do not see the judgment of God before them.

They see the judgment of God in a general sense. The judgment of God falls on other people out there. You know, Hollywood, the media, Europe, bad people, not me. They can't imagine that God's judgment would ever touch them. In their mind, God judges according to their own standard. So while they want God to be harsh toward others, they view that God should cut them some slack. This is what it means to be "pretty good." It should be good enough for God. My good should outweigh the bad.

What happens with that is the hope of salvation actually rests in my own good intentions, and I count on God seeing my good intentions and judging me in accordance with that. Paul describes something else. He describes the wrath of God revealed in his judgment. It is a day of wrath, the great day. On that day God's judgment will be revealed to everyone. The picture you should have in your mind is of a great curtain being pulled back so everything can be seen.

The word Paul uses here in verse 5, *revealed*, is actually the title of a book of the Bible, the last book of the Bible: Revelation. It is the revelation of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is revealed in all of his glory to the world. Do you know *how* he is revealed in that book? In judgment, in the day of wrath. It is a day of mercy to those who trust in Christ, but to those who do not it is a day of judgment and wrath.

It's not just a general judgment that's revealed. Look at how Paul describes it. It is exactly a righteous judgment. We might even say a just condemnation. God has *his* standard, not ours. The sooner we learn that we do not control God's judgment, the better fit we are to understand the reality of the world. It's God's judgment to execute. Paul says in verse 6, "He will render..." God renders the judgment. It's a universal judgment. "He will render to each one..." Everyone will receive the judgment, and everything will be taken into account. "He will render to each one according to his works."

This is not something we can ignore. Paul is showing it to us, but he is just repeating, in a sense, what Jesus said in Matthew, chapter 16. "For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done." This is also found in the Old Testament. As a matter of fact, Paul quotes virtually verbatim in verse 6 from Psalm 62:12 and Proverbs 24:12, that God's judgment will be revealed to all, that no one is exempt and all will be judged according to their works.

## **Two Paths**

Paul is stripping away our misconception about God. Far too often, we think God cares about sin the same way *we* care about sin. That is, not too much. It's inconvenient. It may not be the best, but it's really not that big of a deal. We think God judges us as we would judge ourselves: by our intentions. We try to be a good person. We try to do as best as we can, but hey, nobody is perfect. Right?

The fundamental thing is we believe there is a huge gray area between Jesus and the worst of sinners, and we fall somewhere along that continuum, and God judges along a huge gray area somewhere in between. Do you know what Paul says to that? "No." Paul says there are only two paths in life, and he sets this up with a parallelism. Remember the lead-in to verse 7 in verse 6. "He will render to each one according to his works..."

What are the *works* we will have rendered to us on? There are only two types of lives that are marked by works. There are "those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality," and there are "those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness." It's one or the other. There

are not 4 ways. There are not 12 ways. There are not 143 ways. There are 2. Paul lists them both, and they are mutually exclusive. Let's look at the second way of living, the second path first.

Paul says in verse 8, "...for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek..." This path is followed by those who are self-seeking. That is, they don't want God. They suppress the knowledge of God. They desire only their own things, and this results in a rebellion against God and harm to others.

When Paul uses this word *self-seeking*, it's very interesting. It is basically just a word used in the New Testament. We're not exactly sure where its root comes from. It's one of two things. They're actually close. One possibility is that it means ambition, being selfish, self-centered. The other possibility is that it comes from the word that means strife, contention, conflict. You can see how these two things could go together quite easily. When I'm only worried about myself I struggle with other people, because I want what *I* want, and I don't *care* what you want.

It's interesting that the one place this word is used outside of the New Testament is very helpful for you and me in our day and age. Aristotle uses this word to describe a politician who seeks office by unfair means. That's not exactly someone who's endearing to people, is it? No. It's self-seeking. You get this. It's me, myself, and I. It's taking care of number one. It's not having time for anyone else. It's only *my* judgment counts, not what anyone else thinks, including God.

This works itself out practically in their lives. They do not obey the truth. They *know* the truth, but they refuse to obey it. They are not persuaded by the truth. They acknowledge that the truth exists, but it has no bearing on their life. Instead, they obey unrighteousness, and that is exactly what Paul told us the wrath of God was revealed against in chapter 1, verse 18. It's revealed against unrighteousness, and it is what fills the sinners of chapter 1, verse 29: unrighteousness.

So God sees their works, the entirety of their life, and renders accordingly. Paul is saying that sinners need to give up the fantasy that God will cut them some slack. He says that whether your sin is obvious or not, if your life is marked by self-seeking and rebellion against God, you *will* receive what that deserves, and what it deserves is wrath and fury.

This is because God has fierce opposition to all evil and sin. If he didn't judge sin, he wouldn't be God. He wouldn't be good. He wouldn't be just. There is no escaping this judgment. Notice how universal it is. Paul says it applies to every human being. There's no exception to be found, but there is a second path. Paul has set up a deliberate parallelism. Notice the one path we just looked at occurs in verses 8 and 9, and the other path occurs in verses 7 and 10.

Paul does this, only giving us two, and he uses this rhetorical device, like bookends on the end and in the middle, to draw attention to the fact that there are only two paths. He takes out the gray area. We might think God's judgment upon sin is, to use a ubiquitous twenty-first century word, *nuanced*, gray. That is, with bliss on the one end and horrific torture on the other end and everything else in between. As long as we land somewhere in the middle, a little closer to bliss than torture, we're in good shape.

Paul won't allow us to think that way. There is not a gray area. There is not a nuance in God's judgment. There are two paths that are mutually exclusive. Either someone is self-seeking or they are God seeking. The other path, the path of God seeking, is for those who seek after God and his will. "To those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life..."

Now wait a minute. Is this a bit confusing? Is Paul saying that those who do good works inherit eternal life? That's exactly what *well-doing* is. It's good works, just using a synonym. Isn't that against what he just said in chapter 1, verse 17, that the righteous live by faith not by works? Hasn't Paul been saying to us over and over again that everyone is a sinner, that all are condemned, both those who sin outwardly and those who sin inwardly?

We know that in just a bit, in chapter 3, Paul will tell us that *all* have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. So what is Paul saying here? Well, I can tell you this: commentators are confused, but it seems to me that there is a consensus that Paul means one of two things. I think they actually go well together. I think Paul could be meaning both of them at the same time.

The first thing Paul could mean is that he is describing what works need to be done to be right before God. That is, he is telling us what we must do if works were all we had. He's saying your whole life would have to be marked by good works. Every day, in every way, in every action, in every thought and every word, you would have to be doing a good work. Not just *some* of the time, not just *most* of the time, but *all* the time. What would be required is perfection.

Your whole life would be marked by good works. God would see what you do, that you are seeking his glory and his honor, and your works would be such that God would judge you as perfect. But there's a problem, isn't there? You're not perfect. Neither am I. You know it. I know it. Now remember, there's no sliding scale here. There's no gray area. There's only one way or the other. There are only two paths: perfect righteousness and God-centered life or a life of sin and judgment.

Paul is showing us the foolishness of thinking we can do just enough to get over the hump, that we can do just enough for God to give us slack. Paul is actually pointing us back to the righteousness we get from another in chapter 1, the righteousness that comes from the one who *is* perfect in every way, who always obeyed the law of God, who never broke God's law, who always did what was commanded, who never did what was forbidden, who is perfect in all his ways and righteousness: the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is all a part of Paul's argument. Now I understand that it has been several weeks since we looked at chapter 1, verse 17, but look in your Bibles. It's like 75 words for Paul. It's all a part of his same argument. He's building this argument up. He's telling us that we are not able to be judged on our works because we fall short, and we need the righteousness of another who does *not* fall short.

I think there's also a second possibility here that feeds into the first. That is, that Paul is describing the general tenor of the life of the believer, the general method of life of the believer. Now, the believer is not saved by works. That's why we call the believer the *believer*. It's because he believes on Jesus Christ. Otherwise, what would we call him? The *worker*. Right? We don't.

So the general tenor of the believer's life is becoming more and more like Jesus Christ. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, it is performing good works. Not in everything the believer does, not in everything the believer thinks, but if one has been changed by Jesus Christ, if one has been given a new heart of flesh and the Holy Spirit indwelling by power, then we are to see that person become more and more like Jesus.

How do you tell if a fruit tree is in good shape and healthy? Do you get out saws and shovels and pick axes and dig down and rip out the roots to see if the roots are healthy and in the ground and getting nourishment? I don't know about you, but you know me. I don't like that kind of hard work. What I do is I go up and pick a piece of fruit off the tree. If the fruit is good, then I know the tree is good. If the fruit is diseased or nonexistent, then I know the tree is diseased or dead.

So it is with the believer. It is not that our good works *earn* us a standing before God, but our good works show that we have been changed by the works of Jesus. You are indeed saved by works, just not your own...the works of Christ. Paul is saying that the tenor of the life of the Christian should no longer be self-centered, should no longer be sinful, should no longer be rebellion. We should not nourish sinful desires. We should not make excuses for our sin.

Now we *will* sin, but we should not make excuses or somehow glorify our sin as being relevant in the world today. No, instead, the sinner should be patient in well-doing. When Paul uses the word *patient* here, he means steadfast, to endure in good works. It looks something like this. I saw film this week of an Olympics in which an American runner was running in a long-distance race. When the gun went off, there was a pack of runners who went off, and then there was this American about 10 or 12 lengths behind the whole pack.

When they interviewed him afterward, he said he thought about giving up, because he wasn't just last. The other guy who was last was at least with the pack. He was so far he couldn't *get* to the pack. But he was a runner. He wasn't a wrestler. He wasn't a javelin thrower. He wasn't a gymnast. He was a runner. So do you know what he did? He ran, because runners run. He didn't stop. He kept running. If you remember this Olympics, he wound up actually winning the race.

In our context, that's not important. It's not the winning or the losing that's important. It's the not giving up. It's the persevering in who you are. When you are a runner, you persevere in running. When you are a Christian, you persevere in Christ. You never give up. No matter how dark the providence is, no matter how hard the circumstances are, no matter how difficult the besetting sins are, you never give up, because there is always hope in Jesus. All of this is crucial for us to see, because it is literally a matter of eternal life and death. We cannot impose our standards on God. He is the Judge, not us.

## **The Judge's Judgment**

So we see *the Judge's judgment* in verse 11 as Paul wraps up this section. He says, "For God shows no partiality." It's interesting that Paul ends this section much the way he began it in verse 5. In verse 5, he started by telling us God's righteous judgment would be revealed, that it would be God's standard we would see, that it would be a good and right and just standard. There would be no favoritism involved. Now, in verse 11, he reiterates this. "God shows no partiality."

Paul is telling us we need to take seriously God's criteria for judgment, not our own. Now what does that mean? Let me make it simple for you. You cannot count on God bending the rules for you. That means you cannot consider that God will judge you less harshly because you're an American or because you showed up at church, even though you hated it and you were bored and you went to sleep; even though you obeyed your parents outwardly or paid your taxes or tried to generally be a good neighbor to others or even that you were respected in society at large. No, God does not show favoritism.

The word *partiality* actually means God doesn't look at the face. He doesn't judge based on who the person is. He doesn't show favoritism, preferring one person over another person without a good reason. God is just when he judges. If we think otherwise, we are saying we don't need God's grace. We're saying, "I'm not so bad, God. I don't need help from you. I don't need Jesus." The funny thing is when you say that, in the next breath what you say is, "But what I *do* need is general grace that fudges the test, that grades on a curve. I don't need specific grace in Jesus, but I just need general grace in general."

The grace God has given specifically in Christ, that he has spoken of in his Word and has directly called you to... Will you reject that grace? Then will you somehow think God will distribute some kind of bland, amorphous benefit to you because you deserve it? The Bible tells you there's no hope there at all. God shows no partiality. Do not think he will wink at you and judge others. God shows no partiality.

So where is your hope, then? How can you face the just Judge of all? The Bible tells me that every single person sitting in this room, no matter where you were born, no matter how old or young you are now, no matter where you come from, no matter how long you have been in church, will stand before the just Judge of all. Where can you find shelter from this just judgment, from this storing up of wrath that you have stored up every single day of your life?

The answer is not to presume on God's grace but, instead, to seek it, to run to the grace God has given in Jesus Christ. The good news is that God is not partial. No matter what you have done, no matter how you have rebelled, no matter how long you have waited, God has grace in Jesus. He is not a respecter of persons.

The finished work of Jesus Christ, paying for sins on the cross of Calvary, is there for everyone who trusts in him. God's judgment is just, and it is good. All of those who are hidden in Christ, trusting in *his* good works rather than their own, can trust that God will render to them according to Jesus' works, that he will render to them glory and honor and eternal life. This is our hope: the works of Jesus applied to us by faith alone.