

When We Judges Meet the JUDGE! Romans 2: 1-11

Well the World Series is over and the Cubs won! Being married to a Chicagoan I have faithfully tried to watch most of the games. But when the final game went to 1:30 in the morning, I must confess to zoning out somewhere between the 7th and 10th innings. At least I was there in the chair, because it was part of my wedding vows—*“to love honor and cheer for Cubs and Bears”*. And since the Cubs hadn't made it to the World Series in 108 years, I figured I could sacrifice some sleep this time around. **I did learn something while watching the games; even World Series umpires are not necessarily the best of judges** for some reasons they can help and some reasons they can't help.

For instance in the very first Cleveland game I was surprised to hear that the home plate umpire was also a Cleveland native; this automatically gave us Cub watchers cause to question his impartiality. And when he called a couple of obvious Cleveland strikes as “balls,” even John Lester, the Cub's star pitcher began to question his impartiality. But, with a few quiet words between these two, the ump's eyesight improved and the game went along fairly evenly after that. **Justice.**

All we ask for is justice, we want what is fair and right, whether it be in our sports or any other aspect of life. We've been calling out “THAT'S NOT FAIR” since we were five years old. We want bad people punished and good people rewarded. In this we show God's built in moral compass. Knowing right from wrong is part of the image of God that He has crafted into our very being. So in Romans, chapter one, as Paul describes the level of moral depravity that humanity sinks into when it suppresses this internal knowledge of God--we quickly agree; those “bad people” are without excuse. They know better, they deserve God's justice.

But here at the start of Chapter two, Paul slips us a zinger. Because when you look through his list of horrible sins, right in there along with the morally perverse, the ruthless murderers, and the applauders of evil, you will also find these things: greed and gossip, envy and covetousness, pride and boasting, rebelliousness and heartlessness. Many of these are our everyday sin—the small stuff—that we generally excuse in ourselves.

And we, who know that the just God will judge all people according to all their deeds, nevertheless play mind games with ourselves about this. We who condemn murderers, have we nurtured our own private hates. We who want to want to punish deceitful people, haven't we told our little white lies, forgiven our own petty thefts?

So Paul is declaring that we “good people,” by playing judge, by our willingness to condemn others' sins, have also condemned ourselves because like those bad people we have judged, we have also knowingly done wrong and are also deserving of God's just condemnation. By our willingness to condemn in others what we excuse in ourselves, we prove that we are equally debased in our thinking, equally “without excuse.”

So if we want to play judge in this life—and who among us hasn't from time to time—Paul would remind us that one day we too may be judged, not by just any judge, but by THE JUDGE. As we read last week in Psalm 50.

The mighty one, God the Lord,
speaks and summons the earth
from the rising of the sun to its setting...
that he may judge his people...
for God Himself is Judge
Psalm 50:1-6

And unlike us, THE JUDGE follows a much different standard than we who like to shape our condemnations and justifications from a more personal angle.

THE JUDGE

1. Sees and judges only according to the truth
2. Does withhold judgment for the sake of extending mercy.
3. And plays no favorites; mercy or justice will be given equally to all.

Let's look at these one at a time.

Where our judgments are at best partial, and often prejudiced, THE JUDGE judges everyone – including us--only according to the truth.

We know that God's judgment on those who do [wrong] is in accordance with truth.'

So do you imagine, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgment of God? (Romans 2:2-3)

One of our debased mind games is in thinking that God, as THE JUDGE sees and will judge others while somehow overlooking our own sins. The truth is for God to be good, He has to judge all sin that he sees—like a baseball umpire he has to call every ball, every strike, no matter who's pitching, who's batting, or whose team is his favorite.

But we can't help being prejudiced by our personal perspective on each situation. It's a general rule that **there are always three sides to most marital arguments: his side, her side, and then there's the truth.** But even when we try being impartial, we humans can't help being somewhat "off" in all our judgments because we just can't see everything. For instance the baseball pitcher knows that whatever side of the plate the umpire stands on, he can very accurately call those pitches that come over his side of the plate. But he will not be as accurate calling pitches that come in over the other side of the plate. So a pitcher can sometimes get away with throwing a bad ball to that far side.

The problem is that God, THE JUDGE, sees everything. He's not blinded by any off angles and His only perspective on every issue is the truth.

The Lord looks down from heaven;
he sees all humankind.
From where he sits enthroned he watches
all the inhabitants of the earth —
he who fashions the hearts of them all,
observes all their deeds.
Psalm 33:13-16

God sees everything and remembers everything. If you are watching this season of "Dancing with Stars", then you know **Marilu Hemmer**, famous for her role in the sitcom "Taxi," who has a unique talent that sometimes gets in the way of her learning the next new dance. Marilu has hyperthymesia—an extremely detailed autobiographical memory that remembers in precise detail every event that ever happened to her; she can't forget a thing. Imagine what it must be like to never forget a thing. And if a human being can do this, think of what God remembers: seeing everything, knowing everything, bringing truthful judgment upon everything.

Remember when some Pharisees brought a woman to Jesus for judgment. She'd been caught in the very act of adultery. There was little doubt about her guilt and Jesus acknowledged that. But what was the judgment he gave? "*Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.*" And no-one did, did they? All of them stood guilty in their own sight, all in the same need of God's grace and mercy as was she.

And did you notice that even Jesus chose not to judge her, though he was qualified to do so. Why didn't he? He recognized that judgment belongs to God. It is for this reason, Jesus also warned us not to play judge, *because with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get* (Matthew 7:1). Here then is a serious warning for us when we take the role of judge upon ourselves. THE JUDGE who sees and remembers everything we do has truthfully judged us "good people" as equally sinful, equally guilty, and equally deserving of condemnation.

Another way that THE JUDGE is different from all us little judges, is that we believe "Justice delayed is justice denied." But God has a different saying: "**Justice delayed is grace applied.**" God can and does delay justice out of mercy, giving us time to repent. But we, in our debased thinking, rationalize that since judgment hasn't come swiftly, perhaps it might not come at all.

Or do you despise God's kindness and forbearance and patience?
Do you not realize that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?
(Romans 2:4)

There is some strange kink in our fallen nature that wants to take justice into our own hands and speedily punish that offender—other than ourselves. So if the court takes too long we form a lynch mob. If we blame the system for injustice we riot and plunder the city. We want to see bad people punished. But THE JUDGE just doesn't work that way.

The Apostle Peter wrote his two short letters to Christians who were facing persecution for their faith by the rather unrighteous culture in which they lived. From what he wrote, we can guess that they were getting impatient with God and looking for His speedy return to punish all those evil doers; Peter gave them this surprising reply.

The Lord is not slow about his promise,
as some think of slowness,
but is patient with you,
not wanting any to perish,
but all to come to repentance.
2 Peter 3:9

Yes, when Judgment Day comes, God will judge, and vent his wrath on all that is sinful; and it will be destroyed. But would you be surprised to learn that THE JUDGE doesn't want to condemn anyone? As part of His creation, made in His image, even in the debased condition to which we have come. God wants to offer us mercy rather than judgment; this is the heart of the Gospel message. We may say it, but God truly does hate the sin but love the sinner.

Indeed, God did not send
the Son into the world
to condemn the world,
but in order that the world
might be saved through him.

John 3:17

So God's patience is meant to lead you and everyone else to repentance. Evidence of our debased thinking is that we are quick to judge and punish, while God wants to forgive and save.

So THE JUDGE, will judge everyone based on the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. But THE JUDGE is in no hurry to judge, because He would rather extend forgiveness. Finally, THE JUDGE—again unlike ourselves is completely impartial, showing no favoritism to either individuals or nations.

God will repay according to each one's deeds ...
anguish and distress for everyone who does evil,
whether Jew or Gentile.
but glory and honor and peace
for everyone who does good,
whether Jew or Gentile ...
For God shows no partiality.
(Romans 2:9-11)

The third way we fail as judges is in our own showing of favoritism; loving those who love us, and expecting God to show us similar favoritism, you know, cutting some slack for his homeys. Paul's letter was written to a Church made up of both messianic Jews and Gentile believers. Back then the Jews knew they were God's people; did He not call them his nation of priests, did not God personally make His covenant with them (Deuteronomy 7:12-14)? These days we Christians also claim to be God's Covenant people. Doesn't He now call us His nation of priests (1 Peter 2:9-11)? Do we really think he will let us slide while calling others to task?

That is not how it works. We who are quick to judge others need to know that when He comes as THE JUDGE, God will be completely impartial—judging us religious types equally as He judges others.

When, comedic actor W. C. Fields, who was famous for having little concern for God or religion, was hospitalized near the end of his life, a friend came to visit and was

surprised to find WC reading a Bible. When asked what he was doing WC simply replied, "looking for loopholes".

The bottom line with God is that there are no loopholes, no fine print disclaimers. If we expect God to judge others' sins while giving us a pass—then we are in for a big shock. THE JUDGE'S summary is that there is "no one who is righteous, not even one" (Romans 3:11) All are equally guilty before God.

At this point, you may be thinking you just heard a "works for salvation" sermon. But never forget that Paul opened his letter by declaring

'The one who is righteous will live by faith.'

Romans 1:16-17

Paul is very clear, the whole Bible is very clear, that we are only saved by grace through faith—and there is no other way of salvation other than that. So what Paul has been doing here in chapters one and two is proving that all of us from the worst of the bad people to the best of the good people are equally guilty before God THE JUDGE, the bad people for doing and applauding what they know to be wrong, and us good people for condemning them while excusing ourselves. In this we show that we are all equally debased, equally guilty. And Paul isn't finished yet in describing our lostness. He continues grinding on this theme through the rest of chapter two and half of chapter three before giving us some good news.

The story is told that in the midst of one of Jonathan Edwards famous sermons on the judgments of God and the threat of eternal damnation in Hell, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"—probably taken right from today's scriptures—one of the parishioners cried, "but Rev. Edwards, is there no mercy with God?" The good preacher responded by saying "that they had to wait until the following Sabbath before they got to that part of the message" (Romans. Sproul, p.58).

I won't make you wait that long. Remember what I said during the Scripture reading--that the first half of Paul's letter to Rome is his extended Gospel tract describing, explaining, and justifying God's plan of salvation; handling every objection that comes up. So in chapter two He wants to remind us of the basis on which even we "good people" now live as covenant people of God, whether we're Jews, or Christians.

So ask yourself—especially in view of today's cautions toward us "good people" who would help God judge. On what basis are you able to call yourself a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ, a child of God?

It's not on the basis of your obedience to the law, or being a "good person" is it? At least I hope it isn't, because if it is, Paul just showed you haven't got a leg to stand on. Not one person in this room has anywhere near the level of righteousness that would allow us to stand before God claiming to have earned the title "Christian."

No, the only basis on which we can claim to be a member of the covenant people of God is the basis given here in verse four. Look at it.

"Do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience?" (Romans 2:4a)

This is the basis on which we stand: The riches of God's kindness; his incredible forbearance and patience with us rebellious human beings. We'll hear more of this kindness and forbearance in the next few chapters of course, but can you see what our judging of others does to the grace of God which He has shown to us and would also show them? If we turn back to law and judgment when we look at others, then we are ignoring where God's grace would lead us all, which is to **repentance**.

It's all very well, you see, to cry out for justice, but the danger of asking for justice is that when God metes out justice he does it without favoritism. Justice for all will be a terrible thing on the last day. Listen to how Amos describes the final day of God's judgment:

"Alas for you who desire the day of the LORD! Why do you want the day of the LORD? It is darkness, not light; as if someone fled from a lion, and was met by a bear; or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall, and was bitten by a snake. Is not the day of the LORD darkness, not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?"
(Amos 5:18-20 NRSV)

If we desire God's judgment to be brought down on our fellow human beings, we risk it also falling on us. On that day God will judge all people in truth.

So what is our appropriate response to God's kindness and forbearance and patience?

Repentance.

**"Do you not realize that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?"
Romans 2:4b**

Our appropriate response to God's grace is to turn to Him in repentance; bowing before his feet and asking for His forgiveness for our sins. **"It's very hard to look down on someone when you're kneeling at Jesus feet"**.

The alternative to repentance is stubborn refusal to admit our failings, to think that we're good enough by ourselves, not to mention better than the next person. All that does is to store up wrath for ourselves, wrath that we'll receive on the last day when God's righteous judgment is revealed against all those who demand such.

No, my only hope, your only hope, is to turn to God in repentance and to call on the *"riches of God's kindness and forbearance and patience,"* to claim the Gospel of Jesus Christ for ourselves.

Because [the Gospel] is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.
(Romans 1:16)

When we truly believe this then we will take off our judges robes and the only righteousness we will claim for ourselves, or anyone else—is that which God's grace can give us through Jesus' death and resurrection on our behalf, to cleanse us from our sins and bring us safely home to God.

Are you ready for some grace yet?

And are you now willing to give the same grace to others that you would want for yourself?

My hope is built on nothing less Than Jesus' blood and righteousness; No merit of my own I claim, But wholly trust in Jesus' name. On Christ, the solid rock, I stand. All other ground is sinking sand.