

Text: Romans 2:1-16

Ser# 5190

Title: The Guilt and Condemnation of the Moral Critic

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Group: Romans: The Gospel of the Righteousness of God

Sermon Type: Expository Sermon

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Fallen Condition Focus: People prefer to compare themselves favorably with other people instead of acknowledging their own failure to meet God's standard of righteousness.

Propositional Statement: Although you may claim a position of moral superiority over others by judging them, you are guilty and without excuse before God.

Introduction:

1. I remember a time when our children were all very small (about the size of the Spooner children). We were having family devotions together and I said, "Everybody bow your heads and close your eyes while we pray." As soon as I finished praying, Beth spoke up, "Daddy, Luke had his eyes open during prayer!" How do YOU think I responded to that statement???? Obviously, Luke was being naughty to have his eyes open during prayer. But Beth thought that she was a good girl and considered herself much better than her older brother. But by tattling on her brother and judging her brother's actions to be wrong she was providing undeniable proof that she was also guilty of doing the same thing!
2. Children have a way of showing us ourselves as we really are. We too like to go around accusing others of their sins and congratulating ourselves for not committing the sins we see them commit. But we never stop to consider that we may be guilty, in one way or another, of the same things for which we judge them. We think that because we can clearly see the sins of others, we are somehow better than they are, more acceptable to God, more righteous than they.
3. It is certainly true that *people generally prefer to compare themselves favorably with others, instead of acknowledging their own failure to meet God's standard of righteousness*. But it is important that you understand what your true position is before God. You may think that you are morally better than many other people and in a position to judge them for their sins. You may think that your generally good deeds make you more acceptable to God. If this is what you think and believe, then you are in for a rude shock!
4. In the last few messages over Romans chapter 1, we saw that the Gentiles, and all men, have the light of God's natural revelation in creation, but they have purposefully turned away from God and plunged deeply into rebellion. They are completely sinful, guilty, and without excuse (v. 20). In today's text we go a step further. We will learn that even those who claim moral superiority over other people (as the Jews did) are also sinful and guilty before God. *Although you may claim a position of moral superiority over others by judging them, you are guilty and without excuse before God.*

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- I. The truthfulness of God's judgment proves you are guilty before God. vv. 1-5 "*We are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth.*"

A. Through your act of judging others you condemn yourself. v. 1

1. “thou art inexcusable” **Explanation:** (1) Paul changes from “they” (in chapter 1 describing the Gentiles) to “you” (2nd person singular). Although Paul doesn't clearly identify who it is that he is addressing until v. 17, it should be apparent that he is addressing the Jews. The Jews considered themselves to be morally superior to the Gentiles because they had the Law of Moses and avoided contamination by idolatry and the gross sexual sins which accompanied it. (2) But with this statement Paul holds the Jewish moral critic just as guilty as the Gentile sinners that they pass judgment on (cp. 1:20, “without excuse”). Paul is showing that the Jews are also guilty and without excuse before God.
2. “O man, whosoever thou art that judgest” **Argumentation:** Paul is particularly showing how the Jew's feelings of moral superiority because of their possession of the Law were falsely based. They were notorious for their scornful criticisms of the wicked Gentiles. But in the end, it turns out that the Jews are in no better position with God than the Gentiles are! *We can apply these statements to those today who also look critically on the sins of others around them and claim to be morally better than them.*
3. “thou condemnest thyself” **Explanation:** The self-righteous person is in reality a self-condemned person! Like the little girl who says, “Daddy, he had his eyes open during prayer!” the person who points out the faults of others to make himself look good is really proving his own guilt.
4. “for thou . . . doest the same things” **Argumentation:** In what way can the moral critic be accused of doing the same things? Although the Jews may not have been involved in idolatry and gross sexual license, they were still guilty of the same kinds of sins as the Gentiles in other ways. The demonstration of Gentile sinfulness and guilt is found in a list of vices described in 1:29-31. The Jews were equally guilty of all of these sins.

B. Through your act of judging others God condemns you. vv. 2-5

1. “the judgment of God is according to truth” **Explanation:** The truth here is God's justice. Because God judges justly and fairly, he must judge the moral critic justly and fairly also. Many Jews believed because God made a covenant with them and gave them the Law, therefore they had a free ticket to heaven. They felt that God would overlook their sins. But because God judges according to truth, he will treat your sin in the same way as the sin of any other person. *In fact, your judgment of the sins of others provides the very standard by which God will judge your sins!*
2. **Argumentation:** vv. 3-5 provide a stair step explanation of how God will make your action of judging others' sins the means of proving your own guilt:
 - a. v. 3. In judging others you are failing to accept responsibility for your own sins.
 - b. v. 4. In failing to accept responsibility you are despising God's forbearance.

c. v. 5 In despising God's forbearance you are treasuring up wrath.

3. “thinkest thou . . . that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?”
Explanation: God does not give a “Chance” card to some people that says: “Get out of jail free!” *People who compare themselves to others and judge others are ultimately failing to take responsibility for their own sinful actions.* But God will still hold them accountable, no matter what they might think.
4. “or despisest thou the riches . . .” **Explanation:** Three words describe God's goodness in this verse: (1) “goodness” is literally “graciousness.” It means His kindness and benevolence. (2) “forbearance” is God's tolerance of man's sin. He does not immediately avenge his holiness, but allows man space to repent. (3) “longsuffering” describes God's patience. He is not in a hurry to pass judgment on man, but bears long with him. God's purpose for showing this character is woo man to repentance (cp. 2Pet 3:9). These three traits of God's character are a rich treasure store available for man's benefit. *But when men fail to accept responsibility for their own sinful actions, when they fail to acknowledge their sin by repentance, they are despising—looking down on—God's grace and failing to acknowledge their obligation to God.* This was the very way in which the Gentiles started down the path of moral degeneracy (1:21, “neither were thankful”).
5. “treasurest up unto thyself wrath” **Explanation:** When men go on in their self-righteousness, judging others and despising God's gracious invitation to repent of their own sin, then they are continually laying up an increasing store of God's judgment which they will one day finally receive in full measure. *Thus they use God's patience and forbearance to increase their own guilt and judgment!*
6. “against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” **Explanation:** This is clearly describing a future day of judgment that will come to every man (cp. v. 16). **Argumentation:** Thus we see that there is both a present dimension to the revelation of God's wrath (1:18) and a future dimension (2:5). God's wrath is now being revealed in his judicial handing over of sinners to the consequences of their sinful choices; God's wrath will be revealed ultimately when he executes his sentence against sinners at the last judgment. cp. Heb 9:27

Transition: We can not only see the fact of truthfulness of God's judgment, but . . .

II. The impartiality of God's judgment proves you are guilty before God. 6-11 “For there is no respect of persons with God.”

A. He rewards those who work good with eternal life. 6-7, 10

1. “who will render to every man according to his work” **Argumentation:** vv. 6, 11 form a bracket around this section which shows that God is completely fair, just, and impartial in his judgment. The Jewish moral critic must expect to have his case treated by God with strict impartiality. It

is important to remember that in this section, Paul is describing the only two possible outcomes for the person who depends upon his “work” as the basis of judgment. These two possibilities are (1) eternal life for the one who consistently (perfectly) does good works, or (2) condemnation and wrath to the one who works evil.

2. “them who by patient continuance in well doing” **Explanation:** Lit. “patience of good work,” cp. v. 10, “every man that worketh good.” This means a person who perfectly and consistently performs good works according to God's standard of perfection, without lapse. For the Jew this meant keeping the law perfectly.
3. “glory, honor, and immortality” **Explanation:** These are the rewards which God promises to the person who is truly righteous (also “peace,” v. 10). These show that eternal life is truly worth gaining! God made man with an eternal spirit that will live somewhere forever—either in heaven or in hell!
4. “eternal life” **Explanation:** This indicates that if a person did in fact perfectly meet God's standard of righteousness according to the law, then he would be justified (“declared righteous”) in the judgment. But this is describing a potential situation only. In reality, because all men are sinners, no man can or does perfectly meet God's requirements for righteousness. For this reason, no one can ever actually gain eternal life by good works, because every one of us has sinned!

B. He punishes those who work evil with wrath. 8-9, 11

1. “contentious” **Explanation:** lit. “self-seeking” Selfishness is the most prominent element of sin. All sinners pursue their own perceived benefit as their highest priority. Those who are self-righteous seek to establish their own righteousness at the expense of others by judging and comparing. They pursue their own interests without reference to God or anyone else. He does not need God because he thinks rather that God owes him something!
2. “do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness” **Explanation:** Because they are sinners, moral critics are fundamentally aligned with unrighteousness not righteousness. They stand in opposition to God as rebels and enemies.
3. “tribulation and wrath” **Explanation:** This is a further reference to God's day of judgment which is coming for every man. God's wrath (cp. 1:18) is not a bad temper, or uncontrolled rage, but is God's disposition of antagonism and opposition to everything which violates his own holy character.
4. “Worketh evil” **Explanation:** The sins of the Jewish moral critic are identified by their nature.
5. “of the Jew first . . .” **Explanation:** Because the Jew is also a sinner, he cannot expect anything in the judgment except condemnation for his sin. His position as a member of God's chosen nation merely guarantees his

priority in judgment.

6. “There is no respect of persons with God” **Explanation:** Because God is completely impartial, he will judge the Jewish moral critic and hold him equally guilty as the Gentile sinner.

Transition: We have seen the truthfulness of God's judgment and the impartiality of God's judgment; now we must take note that . . .

III. The standard of God's judgment proves you are guilty before God. 12-16 “as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law”

A. Those possessing the Mosaic Law are judged according to the Mosaic Law. 12b-13

1. v. 12 “law” **Argumentation:** 11 X in vv. 12-16 the word law appears. It is used to distinguish between the Jews, who possessed the Law which God gave to them by a special covenant, and the Gentiles who did not have access to that law. As we saw earlier (1:18-20), the Gentiles did not have access to God's special revelation, but they did have God's natural revelation by which they were able to know God's existence and nature. In these verses this concept is extended to include the revelation of natural law which God has placed within every man's nature. The Jews considered their possession of the Mosaic Law as an advantage which would help them in the judgment. Paul shows that, in fact, the Gentiles have access to God's moral law and therefore, Jews and Gentiles stand on equal footing. *The Gentiles are condemned by their disobedience to the law which they possess and the Jews are condemned by their disobedience to the Law which they possess!*
2. “as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law” **Explanation:** The Jews would be judged for their sins against the Law by the higher standard found in the Law.
3. “not the hearers of the law . . .” **Explanation:** The Jews thought that by *hearing* the law they were on a higher spiritual plane than the Gentiles. But hearing without obeying only increases guilt. Thus the Jews' increased opportunity to know and to know more clearly God's will, also gave them increased responsibility.
4. “the doers of the law shall be justified” **Explanation:** This is the first occurrence of this important word in the book of Romans. It is a legal term that means to “declare righteous.” Only those who perfectly keep the law can be “declared righteous.” It is all or nothing (Jas 2:10).

B. Those without the Mosaic Law are judged according to the natural law which they do possess. 12a, 14-16

1. v. 12a “sinned without law” **Explanation:** The law is the Law of Moses. As 1:18-32 described, the Gentiles sinned apart from the special revelation made by God to the Jews. As a result they also will “perish” apart from the

Mosaic Law. This perishing is the punishment they receive at the last judgment for their own sin and guilt.

2. v. 14 “do by nature the things contained in the law” **Explanation:** This declares that God has placed a moral law within man's nature which is available to every man. This is proved by people's acknowledgment of a moral standard which they act upon and which can be observed in their behavior.
3. “which show the work of the law written in their hearts” **Explanation:** The evidence of this natural law is seen in man's moral nature.
4. “their conscience also bearing witness” **Argumentation:** Conscience is man's innate ability to distinguish between moral right and wrong. It has three functions:
 - a. It is a **moral imperative** which demands that he do what he knows to be right and restrains him from doing what he knows to be wrong.
 - b. It is a **judge** which passes judgment on every decision and action that he makes.
 - c. It is an **executor** which punishes him when he does what he knows to be wrong and commends him when he does what he knows to be right.
5. “their thoughts . . . accusing or else excusing” **Explanation:** Within the heart of man there is a continuous tribunal in session which considers his actions and passes judgment over them. In many cases it brings an accusation; in some cases it brings exoneration.
6. “in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men” **Explanation:** All of these secret thoughts will be brought to light in the judgment and become part of the evidence placed in public record demonstrating the justice of God's judgment.

Conclusion:

1. Three facts prove the guilt of the moral critic:
 - a. The truthfulness of God's judgment
 - b. The impartiality of God's judgment
 - c. The standard of God's judgment
2. The moral critic thinks that he will receive a special dispensation from God in the judgment, but God warns him that he will not escape.
3. Ultimately, both Jew and Gentile stand on equal ground before God's judgment: both stand condemned for their sin and disobedience to the law that they possess.
4. v. 16 God's judgment will be carried out by Jesus Christ. That is part of the “gospel” message. That same gospel provides the only true solution to man's sin. It offers the possibility of man being justified by faith. Christ died on the cross to pay for man's sin; those who acknowledge God's grace and turn to him in repentance can receive forgiveness of sins.
5. Jew and Gentile stand on equal ground in their sin, but they also stand on equal ground

for salvation by faith in Christ.