

Who Died and Made You God?

Romans 2:1-16

Key Verse: 2:4

“Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?”

We all like to have a measure of power and authority, some people more than others. Inevitably, if you get a group of people together, there is always at least one person who tries to lead or control the rest of the group. You see it in all stages of life. Get a group of kids together and you will see one bossy kid directing the others. In your class group projects, there is always that one person with a death grip on everything, and then there are the bosses at work who micromanage everything. They nitpick and hover over your every task, chiding you when you get it wrong. These people correct more than encourage; they belittle more than building up; and they more concerned with their own appearance than the wellbeing of their comrades. You know the type of person that I am talking about. You always hate that type of person. If you don’t know what I am talking about, then you are probably that person and everybody hates you, because there is one in every group and if you’ve never seen it, then you are probably it.

When you have one of these people around you and they are trying to take control, many times there is someone else crying out, “Who died and made you king?” How many times does that happen to us? How many times do we assume a mantle of leadership that was never given to us? How many times have we set ourselves as the authority over something? We do it in every aspect of life, like little kids, and no area is more dangerous than in spiritual matters. We like to be the authority over something and don’t like anyone going against our self-proclaimed authority. But here’s a question for you: Who died and made you God? Who died and made you the judge? I ask these questions based on what is brought up in this particular passage. Two weeks ago, we heard about God’s righteousness that he imparts to us through Jesus Christ. We are made right because God declares us to be right. Last week, we heard Paul’s beginning argument about the sinful nature of humanity. Paul directed this portion to the Gentiles, to the nonbelievers, and it laid out how humanity is utterly sinful and how God made himself known to all people through nature. That passage was directed toward those who do not know God and are living their lives denying his very existence. The last passage focused on those who are unrighteous while this passage focuses on those who are self-righteous.

The passage starts out, “You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.” (1) To pass judgment on someone means that you decide who someone is and decide their fate. When you judge someone, there is a whiff of superiority in your thoughts and words. You stand above them, and essentially condemn them. Judgment has a sense of finality as you write a person off as utterly useless and not worth your time and effort. You pass judgment when you don’t like someone because of who they are or what they have done, and you avoid all meaningful contact with that person. Those who pass judgment on other people think that they know the right way and they condemn people who don’t agree with them.

We’re particularly this way with people who have sins that we don’t struggle with. We become extra harsh and bitter toward the partiers because we are pious, or toward the fornicators because we are committed, or toward the selfish because we are thoughtful. When we look at the list of sins at the end of chapter 1, we act a certain way. The verses say, “They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of

envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them." (1:29-32) We look at this list and we act a lot like the Pharisee who prayed in Luke 18, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get." (Luke 18:11-12) We begin to thank God that we are not like the people on the list. We thank God because we are better than that. We think, "Thank you, God, that I am not wicked and greedy and not a gossip." Why thank God for that? Are the wicked, greedy and gossips condemned even as they live now? Why pick those sins out, the ones that you're not? By doing that, we look down on others, passing judgment on them, essentially condemning them.

Yet, verse 1 says, "You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things." When we pass judgment on other people, the Bible says that we are condemning ourselves. So, when we condemn others by judging them, we are also condemning ourselves. It seems a little strange, but verse 1 states that we condemn ourselves because we do the same things. Hold on a second. We're most judgmental to the sins that we don't struggle with. You know that problem with drunkards is that they drink. If they would just stop drinking, then their problem is solved. What's so hard about that? How can you be doing the same thing if you don't struggle with that sin? While that may be true, you still struggle with sin, and what makes your sin less than that other person's sin? We are biased in our sin thinking that our sin is not as bad as another's. We are blinded to the truth.

As the Bible says, "Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth." (2) The truth is who God is and who we are. God is good and righteous, and quite honestly, we are not. God knows the secrets of our hearts and minds, and he will judge us on the very truth that lies in our hearts. "So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment?" (3) God knows everything, so when we judge others, but don't even acknowledge what lies within our own hearts, we set ourselves up to be measured by the same stick that we measure others with, because we are trying to take the place of God. So, who died and made you God? He is the judge and not us.

What a wonderful judge he has been for us. The Bible says that the wages of sin is death (6:23), but God also declares, "I take no pleasure in the death of anyone." (Ezekiel 18:32) God doesn't like killing anyone, and he gives us so many opportunities to change. Verse 4 says, "Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?" God is kind to us, he is gracious to us so that we can repent and come back to him. He shows us our sins while we are still alive so that we can accept his grace to us. This is kind of odd. If you remember, last week showed us that it is God's wrath to us when he leaves us to our own sins. The worst thing he can do to us is to just let us live our destructive lives of sin, but here it is God's kindness to show us our sins. He brings our sins to our attention so that we can repent and turn back to him. When we judge others, we don't judge so that they can return to God, we do it so that we can feel superior, so that we can look better.

Verse 4 calls this showing contempt for God's kindness. A lot of times, we don't like God's kindness because he is kind to people we don't like. The prophet Jonah was called to tell the people of Nineveh that they would be destroyed if they continued in their sin. Jonah didn't want to go to the Ninevites because he knew that the message he was to deliver would cause them to turn away from their sins and repent. Jonah didn't want them to repent; he wanted them to be destroyed. So he ran away, trying to get as far away from Nineveh as possible. Jonah didn't like God's kindness to show the people of Nineveh their sins. He wanted them to die for their wickedness. He thought that he knew better than God and he showed contempt for God's kindness. How often do we do that? How often do we withhold God's kindness and grace to a person or people because we think that they don't deserve it? Isn't that us trying to take the place of God? But, who died and made you God?

Now, I want to take a moment to talk about the difference between judging others and correcting others. The Bible does say that we should correct and rebuke others in their sin. That's part of being knowledgeable about sin, but judgment is different than that. When we correct others with the truth, our hearts really want for that person to repent and return to God, but when we judge, there is a sense of finality in our words and thoughts. We write them off as a lost cause and we do anything to frustrate their efforts to reform, much like Jonah did. Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 2:23-26, "Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will." That's what correcting others is all about, but judgment is about telling people to hell with them.

On Tuesday, the US Ambassador to Libya Chris Stevens was killed at the hand of militants. The militants were enraged at a video that was put up on YouTube that portrayed the prophet Mohammed in a very negative light. The video was produced to incite a violent reaction in Muslims. When certain radicals heard about the video, it fueled their rage against all Americans and they stormed the U.S. Consulate in Libya. The people who killed the Ambassador judged him to be guilty and sentenced him to death. Protests and violence against Americans has spread across the Middle East and even to Australia. The Middle East is judging us because of one man's video posted on YouTube. However, the real issue here is how do you respond to this news and the images you see? Since September 11, 2001, there has been a growing resentment against Muslims in this country. Some people see all Muslims as terrorists. Islam does distort the truth about God, but who are we to write off these people? On Friday, our larger Chicago area church held a World Mission Night, and one person gave a report on our ministry's efforts in the Middle East, and I was encouraged that our missionaries in the Middle East have a real heart to help Muslims to know the love and grace that Jesus brings. It was moving and it begs the question: when was the last time you prayed for those that you hate? The people you judge need Jesus just as much as you do.

Many times we judge others so that we don't have to repent. We judge others so that we deflect any inquiries on the shady parts of our lives. We like to show our goodness and other's evil to avoid our own sins, but the Bible says, "But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed." (5) When we judge other people, we are being unrepentant and stubborn. God has shown us the nature of sin, so that we can repent and lead

others to repentance. Since we do not repent, we actually end up on the receiving end of God's wrath.

But there is a lot of hope, "God 'will repay each person according to what they have done.' To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger." (6-8) To receive the prize of eternal life, we have to persistently seek good, but when we do things for ourselves, and reject the truth about God and our sins, then there is wrath and anger. "There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism." (9-11) The Jews were God's original chosen people. They were the first to be called by God, and they are the particular group that Paul was addressing in this section of his letter. Many of them felt entitled to their righteousness because they had God's law, but here Paul says that if they follow evil, they would be the first to know God's wrath, but if they follow good, then they would be the first to taste God's glory. God's judgment doesn't depend on our background; it depends on our hearts. If we are evil, whether we come from a Christian family or not, then we will perish. If we are good, whether we are Christian or not, then we will live gloriously with God.

Our sin is judged by what we know. As verse 12 says, "All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law." When we sin, whether we know the law or not, we will die. "For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous." (13) Just because we might know the law, that doesn't get us any special privileges. Speed limit signs are posted on many roads. If you get pulled over for speeding, the cop won't let you off just because you knew what the speed limit was. Cops usually ask if you know how fast you were going, not what the speed limit was. It is the same way for God's law, just because we know some of it, that doesn't make us any better than anybody.

Unfortunately, that's exactly what we do when we judge someone. We judge someone because we know what is right and wrong, and we point it out to those who don't know. We do it because we think that we are better because we know something that someone else doesn't. But knowing something doesn't make us special or right. If you want to judge someone, you had better be keeping all the law all the time. When we were studying Galatians, Paul quoted one verse that says this better than any others. In Galatians 3:10, Paul quotes Deuteronomy 27:26, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." If we want to follow the law, we are cursed if we don't continue to do everything that is written. You are a lawbreaker even if you break even the smallest law. If you are a lawbreaker, how are you able to be judge?

The Bible says that we are righteous if obey the law, but who is able to obey all of it all the time? We are sinful people and we are not able to follow it all the time. I dreaded giving this message because I am terribly sinful and hopelessly judgmental. Bob, Mike and I usually get together on Saturday night to go over the message for the next day. So, as I am driving down here from the north side to go over a message on judgment, I found myself judging many of the other drivers. There were at least half a dozen people who were drifting into the lane I was driving in. Naturally, I did the most obvious thing: I yelled at them and lectured them on staying in their own lane as if they could hear me. I wrote them off as idiots got away from them. They were in the wrong, but I took the opportunity to let loose my rage instead of showing them

kindness. This is a lighthearted example of my heart, but it permeates throughout my heart and soul. Honestly, it's not like I am the best driver who ever lived. Eleven years ago in Ohio, I actually ran a truck off the road because I didn't see him in my blind spot, and I almost got three speeding tickets in one week. So much for my stellar driving record. There is nothing that I can say that can prove my righteousness.

So does that mean that when we see sin, we have to sit on our hands and not say anything about it? Obviously not! As Christians, we are called to correct, rebuke and encourage others, but we don't use ourselves as the measuring stick...we shouldn't use our own righteousness, because we don't have any. When we try to stand on our own, we judge but we have no right to. On our own, we are not righteous, but our God is righteous. Jesus is the only one who has never sinned and that makes Jesus the only one who is righteous. The wonderful thing is that Jesus' death and resurrection imprints his righteousness onto us. Jesus declares us to be right, but his grace and kindness to us. It is only with a humble heart that we can see that Jesus' grace and kindness is what we need. The next time that your sin is brought to light, you can either take it as an attack on you or as God's kindness to show you that you truly need Jesus' righteousness because your own is so lacking. So, who died and made you God that you judge others? No one, but Jesus died for your sins to declare you right by his grace.