

The Text

Romans 2:1-16 (CSB) Therefore, every one of you who judges is without excuse. For when you judge another, you condemn yourself, since you, the judge, do the same things. Now we know that God's judgment on those who do such things is based on the truth. Do you think—anyone of you who judges those who do such things yet do the same—that you will escape God's judgment? Or do you despise the riches of his kindness, restraint, and patience, not recognizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance? Because of your hardened and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment is revealed. He will repay each one according to his works: eternal life to those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor, and immortality; but wrath and anger to those who are self-seeking and disobey the truth while obeying unrighteousness. There will be affliction and distress for every human being who does evil, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace for everyone who does what is good, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek. For there is no favoritism with God.

For all who sin without the law will also perish without the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. For the hearers of the law are not righteous before God, but the doers of the law will be justified. So, when Gentiles, who do not by nature have the law, do what the law demands, you are a law to themselves even though you do not have the law. you show that the work of the law is written on their hearts. Their consciences confirm this. Their competing thoughts either accuse or even excuse them on the day when God judges what people have kept secret, according to my gospel through Christ Jesus.

The Support

Matthew 7:1–6 (CSB) “Do not judge, so that you won’t be judged. For you will be judged by the same standard with which you judge others, and you will be measured by the same measure you use. Why do you look at the splinter in your brother’s eye but don’t notice the beam of wood in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the splinter out of your eye,’ and look, there’s a beam of wood in your own eye? Hypocrite! First take the beam of wood out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to take the splinter out of your brother’s eye. Don’t give what is holy to dogs or toss your pearls before pigs, or you will trample them under their feet, turn, and tear you to pieces.

Matthew 12:33–37 (CSB) Either make the tree good and its fruit will be good, or make the tree bad and its fruit will be bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. Brood of vipers! How can you speak good things when you are evil? For the mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart. A good person produces good things from his storeroom of good, and an evil person produces evil things from his storeroom of evil. I tell you that on the day of judgment people will have to account for every careless word you speak. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.”

Matthew 23:1–36 (CSB) Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to his disciples: “The scribes and the Pharisees are seated in the chair of Moses. Therefore do whatever you tell you, and observe it. But don’t do what you do, because you don’t practice what you teach. you tie up heavy loads that are hard to carry and put them on people’s shoulders, but you yourselves aren’t willing to lift a finger to move them. you do everything to be seen by others: you enlarge their phylacteries and lengthen their tassels. you love the place of honor at banquets, the front seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called ‘Rabbi’ by people.

“But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ because you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers and sisters. Do not call anyone on earth your father, because you have one Father, who is in heaven. You are not to be called instructors either, because you have one Instructor, the Messiah. The greatest among you will be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. For you don’t go in, and you don’t allow those entering to go in.

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to make one convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a child of hell as you are!

“Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘Whoever takes an oath by the temple, it means nothing. But whoever takes an oath by the gold of the temple is bound by his oath.’ Blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold? Also, ‘Whoever takes an oath by the altar, it means nothing; but whoever takes an oath by the gift that is on it is bound by his oath.’ Blind people! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift? Therefore, the one who takes an oath by the altar takes an oath by it and by everything on it. The one who takes an oath by the temple takes an oath by it and by him who dwells in it. And the one who takes an oath by heaven takes an oath by God’s throne and by him who sits on it.

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You pay a tenth of mint, dill, and cumin, and yet you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness. These things

should have been done without neglecting the others. Blind guides! You strain out a gnat, but gulp down a camel!

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup, so that the outside of it may also become clean.

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of the bones of the dead and every kind of impurity. In the same way, on the outside you seem righteous to people, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous, and you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we wouldn't have taken part with them in shedding the prophets' blood.' So you testify against yourselves that you are descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your ancestors' sins!

"Snakes! Brood of vipers! How can you escape being condemned to hell? This is why I am sending you prophets, sages, and scribes. Some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. So all the righteous blood shed on the earth will be charged to you, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly I tell you, all these things will come on this generation.

God

God is kind.

We clearly see the heart of God towards legalism. Most of us agree that it is bad. And the rest of us who deep down inside can't see the real reason why it is so bad might struggle with it a lot.

What is legalism? It is when we are so focus on the law of God and obeying God to the point that you end up believing that you are good with God based on what we have done versus what all that God has done.

And you can tell when people struggle with legalism because you are dying to ask you, "But what about...?" For example, "So what you are saying that we don't have to obey God? We just need to believe?"

So to answer that, no. You are never going have me or any church that I attend or all of Orthodox Christianity ever suggest that we don't have to obey God that much." In fact, spoiler alert: Romans 6, 7, and 8 dismantles those types of questions. I will save that argument for when we get there.

Here is the struggle of the legalist: it is self-righteousness.

Here is the truth of God: only God is righteous.

All who were born of Adam have no righteousness within us. We are born to die and perish and be under the wrath of the Almighty God.

Matthew 23:37-39 (CSB) "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her. How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

The day of judgment, reckoning and the wrath of God is soon coming. And Jesus Christ both in the Gospels and in his Revelation amkes it painfully clear: the wrath of God that remains on those who do not trust and obey comes from the Son of God himself.

Where do you see God in the text? What does the text say about God?

The Gospel

In all of my conversations with unbelievers and perhaps well-intentioned Christians are sometimes too focus on humanity. What I mean by that is that you are so fixated on trying to save people who want nothing to do with God but do not want to perish and suffer in hell.

One solution: all are saved by God. But read the Bible and you know that is not true. You are free to cherry-pick some verses to make your argument and you would still be damningly wrong.

Another solution proposed: there is something between Heaven and Hell and good people who might not know God get to go there. One, the Bible doesn't teach that. Two, that is not a way of saving anybody. Three, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

(One thing that is particularly interesting is that religions that particularly struggle with legalism have implemented some sort of grey area between Heaven and Hell such as Roman Catholic teaching on purgatory or Latter-Day Saints' teaching on the three kingdoms of glory.)

But what does the Bible say? Perhaps we speak as Christians who have put their faith, trust, and obedience into Jesus Christ and we have the assurance that we are saved to God forever. Then there is some of us who are not sure or we don't think we are good enough. Finally, what about our neighbor, or our relative, or our gay friend? What about them? How can you be saved? Where is God's heart in all of this?

I say to you all: those who are sick of your own heart. You know the thoughts you think deep down inside. With your mouths you say one thing but you really know what you believe. And it is gross. You have regret all of your wrongdoing and you are just sick of it. You can't stand it. And it is (literally) too damn difficult to keep trying to do the right thing and you keep messing up. And you keep going back to your addictions and vices. You keep picking the wrong lovers. You keep doing the marriage thing over and over until you get it right. You are a dad or a mom who totally jacked up your chances with your kids and now they will have nothing to do with you. You know you are not righteous. You know you have tried and your best wasn't nearly good enough.

If that is you, then take a few seconds to listen how the Almighty, Wrathful, Just, Righteous, and Holy God responds to you right now and every second of your life:

Matthew 11:28-30 (CSB) "Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take up my yoke and learn from me, because I am lowly and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Our Responsibility

Hear that? Jesus Christ who lived, died, and rose again is asking you to come to him. You carrying around slogs of crap around? Give it to him. He will take it. What about that wickedness? What about that sin? What about my anxiety? What about struggles? What about my addictions?

Believe in God. And now that stuff belongs to Him. For all of your mess and disease and crap and sin and wickedness, he is going to give you the lightest and greatest gift of all:

2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV) For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

You see that?

Our originally parents, Adam & Eve, and every human born, exchanged God for sin. Jesus Christ came to earth and exchanged our sin for his righteousness.

Trust in Him and take him at his word. When you do so, you shall be saved.

Pray

MY CRUCIFIED SON OF MAN

All of my wickedness, immorality, perversion, treasonous acts, foolishness, and sin now belong to you.

Give me your righteousness so I can be with you forever.

Amen.