

## ROMANS 2:1-2

### CERTAINTIES: WHEN JUDGING, WE ARE JUDGED!

“You have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things.”<sup>1</sup>

“We know” is an expression used frequently throughout the New Testament. Whenever a reader sees this expression introducing a concept, it is as though the writer is waving a brightly coloured flag; with this literary device, the writer is emphasising a truth that the reader must not ignore. “We know” stresses that what the writer is about to say is a certainty; there can be no appeal because the truth is certain and self-evident. Over the coming weeks we will explore a number of these certainties delivered by the various writers of the Word. These certainties comprise a powerful, practical theology.

Today, I am focusing on quite a stern statement from the pen of the Apostle to the Gentiles. It is almost as though he was rebuking fellow Christians for being judgemental. We might be confused by such a forceful warning, especially in light of what preceded this particular portion of the Letter to Roman Christians.

Jesus had some cautionary words concerning this business of judging. One of His statements seem to have become the life verse for people who knowingly act contrary to the will of God. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned, “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you” [MATTHEW 7:1, 2]. Many rebellious people have memorised the first statement delivered by this divine warning, though few are able to quote the rationale behind the warning.

Perhaps we would be well advised to hear a cautionary statement which the Master delivered on another occasion. At that time, Jesus questioned those who were listening to Him, “Why do you not judge for yourselves what is right” [LUKE 12:57]? The answer implied is that people are caught up with their own arrogance or perhaps held fast in the grip of vengeance.

When some religious leaders were enraged because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, their rage was exacerbated because He was teaching in the Temple; they incited a crowd by muttering against Him. As was His habit, Jesus confronted their rage in quite a direct fashion. Jesus warned, “Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment” [JOHN 7:24]. Clearly, Jesus was cautioning that if you do not have the whole story, avoid judging another.

The darkest statement concerning judging must be one delivered as Jesus was nearing His passion. “Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day. For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me” [JOHN 12:44-50]. Hear what the Master said! Life and pleasing God hang on His words!

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

**ROMANS 2:1, 2**  
**WHEN JUDGING, WE ARE JUDGED**

Despite the Master's teaching, Christians still must render judgement. However, there is a distinction between judging that seeks to injure someone and exercising discernment. Remember that the same Jesus who warned against judging, also said, "You will recognize [evil people] by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, you will recognize them by their fruits" [MATTHEW 7:16-20].

Nevertheless, Christians must be careful about pronouncing judgement against others. The Apostle to the Gentiles cautioned the saints in Corinth, "Do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God" [1 CORINTHIANS 4:5]. Excellent advice.

**THE SETTING FOR THE CERTAINTY** — "Therefore..." Paul begins this portion of his letter with the word "Therefore." An old adage reminds us, "Any time you see a 'therefore,' ask what it is there for." The Greek behind this word infers a logical conclusion. By employing this word, Paul compels us to look at what he has written immediately before this portion of the letter. We need to determine the context if we will understand what the Apostle's concern might have been.

Earlier, the Apostle had taken note of the culture in which the early churches existed. The cultural milieu in which the churches then worshipped and served mirrored in many respects the conditions confronting the Faith in this day. The Faith of Christ the Lord has never shied from confrontation with wickedness; however, it has been on the receiving end of persecution from culture repeatedly throughout the history of the Faith.

The Apostle made the following dark observations about that ancient culture. "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So, they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

"Therefore, God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

"For this reason, God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

"And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them" [ROMANS 1:18-32].

**ROMANS 2:1, 2**  
**WHEN JUDGING, WE ARE JUDGED**

There was a day when this passage would not have been read in public because it was thought too risqué, too salty; no gentleman would deliberately embarrass a lady by speaking so plainly. However, we've come to a day when this particular passage is sedate by contemporary standards. Nevertheless, we are hesitant to read it during a service of worship since those who have given themselves over to lasciviousness cry out in mock horror because the words do not affirm their behaviour. Christians are allowing the wicked to dictate how the Faith is practised. Thus, we dare not risk hurting the feelings of anyone. We fear being called "hateful," or called by some contrived name such as "homophobic," or castigated because we are not affirming.

Underscore in your mind what the Apostle has just described. Writing from Corinth, Paul looked out on a culture in which the individual was exalted; gratification of the flesh had become the *summum bonum* of life. Even at the expense of degrading another, gratification of ones own selfish desires, including every form of deviant sexual desires, was elevated to the highest good. That day was not so different from the day in which we now live and serve.

If you question whether a correlation between that ancient day and this day can be sustained, consider just a few of the transitions we have witnessed in the past several years. Marriage has been redefined and is constantly redefined. The concept of marriage has been transformed from a union of one man and one woman in covenant before God to a union between whoever or even whatever for as long as the participants choose to love one another. Today, marriage is viewed primarily as a means of personal gratification and a matter of convenience rather than a lifelong commitment. Children are too often seen as an inconvenient by-product of sex rather than the *raison d'être* for the marriage union.

According to a recent report from CBS News, kindergarten children are being traumatised at one school as teachers instruct four- and five-year-old boys and girls that they may not be the sex they think they are. A teacher defended her decision to instruct the children in transgenderism, saying in a public meeting, "I'm so proud of my students, it was never my intent to harm any students but to help them through a difficult situation." One parent reported, "My daughter came home crying and shaking so afraid she could turn into a boy."<sup>2</sup>

The ubiquitous gay pride parades throughout the cities of our nation are not likely to be considered family friendly events. These parades normalise what has historically been deemed deviant and abnormal, parents should not imagine that young children will not ask difficult questions concerning sexuality if they should attend.

Divorce has become pandemic in contemporary society; marriage is no longer a lifetime commitment, but rather a tenuous relationship until one party or the other tires of the ties that bind. Raw sex drives the storyline of many means of entertainment, both visual and aural. Our children are exposed to more sexual violence and unrestrained gratification in a week of television viewing and listening to contemporary music than most adults received in the first thirty years of their life.

This is the world in which we live and serve; and those who are infected with and infatuated with the attitudes of this dying world shout out that the faithful must tolerate these attitudes or they are not "real" Christians. Those identified with the world would label Christians as "haters" because they disagree with us. We must never hate, despite their hatred of our Faith.

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<sup>2</sup> "Transgender reveal in kindergarten class leaves parents feeling 'betrayed,'" August 22, 2017, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/transgender-reveal-kindergarten-class-rocklin-academy-parents-upset/>, accessed 23 August 2017; cf. Kimberly Ross, "INDOCTRINATION: Teacher Promotes Transgenderism And Allows 'Reveal' In Elementary Class, August 22, 2017, [http://www.redstate.com/kimberly\\_ross/2017/08/22/tacher-promotes-trans-class/](http://www.redstate.com/kimberly_ross/2017/08/22/tacher-promotes-trans-class/), accessed 22 August 2017

**ROMANS 2:1, 2**  
**WHEN JUDGING, WE ARE JUDGED**

Let the words which the Master spoke sink in as I read them. Jesus instructed disciples, “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father also. If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: ‘They hated me without a cause’” [JOHN 15:18-25].

**NO EXCUSE** — “You have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges” [ROMANS 2:1a]. This is where we are surprised by the Apostle’s words. He had just accurately described the society in which the first Christians lived and served, a society embracing a lifestyle that was wildly out of step with what was expected of the faithful, when suddenly he speaks to the revulsion that was undoubtedly rising in the mind of those to whom he was writing. Paul is speaking directly to those who profess to know Christ; he is writing to Christians. It is Christians who have no excuse if they judge others. The warning is so stark, so abrupt, so unexpected that we are compelled to think carefully what the Apostle has in view so that we can avoid divine censure.

Almost unconsciously we begin to judge those who have given themselves over to what can only be described as a hedonistic lifestyle. It is at this point that the Apostle says, “Whoa! Not so fast! You have no excuse for being judgemental!” Though we are in the midst of a dying world, a world that hates Christians who dare live as Christians, we are more like this world than we imagine. It is not our place to judge the world; we are responsible to declare God’s grace to the world. Even the Master testified, “I did not come to judge the world but to save the world” [JOHN 12:47]. While Jesus will judge all mankind, that judgement is yet future. Paul appeals to “Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead” [2 TIMOTHY 4:1]. Moreover, in that same verse, the Apostle indicates that Christ’s judgement will take place when He appears.

After the removal of the faithful out of the earth, the event identified as “the Rapture,” which will take place at the return of the Christ Jesus, the nations remaining following the Great Tribulation will be judged. The Master spoke of this awful judgement when He taught disciples, “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left” [MATTHEW 25:31-33]. What follows describes a frightful judgement of the nations who will stand arraigned before the returning King of Glory.

The Revelator saw the Judge of the damned revealed; thus, John wrote, “I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” [REVELATION 20:11-15].

**ROMANS 2:1, 2**  
**WHEN JUDGING, WE ARE JUDGED**

Christians listening to this message will undoubtedly recall Jesus' teaching on this matter. "The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment" [JOHN 5:22-29].

I've invested time in this review in order to stress that Jesus is the Judge of the wicked and the just. This knowledge deters us from thinking that we are capable of judging the actions of others. James, the brother of our Lord, cautions, "There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbour" [JAMES 4:12]?

We cannot help but be aware of the drift toward moral irrelevance in this present dying world, and we witness the almost universal and incessant emphasis upon sexual gratification even at the expense of moral integrity. Naturally, we who hold to the Faith of Christ the Lord are offended. We are so offended that we become judgemental. However, we must never forget, "God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous" [HEBREWS 13:4]. God will judge! Not us.

Therein lies the danger! We assume the right to judge others. We move unconsciously into the realm of judging morals and thoughts. While it is true that "The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" [HEBREWS 4:12]; and though it is equally true that "No creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account" [HEBREWS 4:13], we forget that it is God who judges "the thoughts and intentions of the heart." No mere mortal is capable of judging motives, and that includes Christians.

I have a couple of points to make before we move forward with this message. A major point for us to hold in mind is that *we must not be ignorant of actions dishonouring the Master*. We must be discerning as we scrutinise the actions of those about us. The Word of God teaches us that "Solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil" [HEBREWS 5:14]. The point is, we are capable of "distinguishing good from evil!"

This fits with the Master's instruction delivered during His Sermon on the Mount. "You will recognize [false prophets] by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, you will recognize them by their fruits" [MATTHEW 7:16-20].

I understand that those disposed to evil have memorised one command, and one command only: "Judge not, that you be not judged" [MATTHEW 7:1]. However, set in apposition to this command is the instruction that "You will recognise [false prophets] by their fruits."

This fits with the words James has delivered to those who would honour the Risen Master. "Someone will say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works" [JAMES 2:18].

**ROMANS 2:1, 2**  
**WHEN JUDGING, WE ARE JUDGED**

In short, we Christians are not ignorant of what is done by the wicked; nevertheless, we do not call them into judgement. We discern the acts performed and the attitudes displayed by wicked people; however, we confess that we are not competent to judge motives, even when evil acts are deliberately performed to injure us and to dishonour Him Whom we call Saviour.

And that brings me to a second point: *Wicked people do wicked things*. The wicked are incapable to doing righteous deeds. Indeed, they are offended by righteousness. Again, this truth is emphasised when Isaiah wrote so many years ago:

“Peace, peace, to the far and to the near,’ says the LORD,  
‘and I will heal him.  
But the wicked are like the tossing sea;  
for it cannot be quiet,  
and its waters toss up mire and dirt.  
There is no peace,’ says my God, ‘for the wicked.’”

[ISAIAH 57:19B-21]

I watch with dismay as various faith entities appeal to the courts to rectify evil, only to be met by hostility and disappointment at the lack of action by the judiciary. We marvel at the decisions rendered by learned judges who avow that they are seeking justice. We witnessed in recent days judgement that censured a bakery for failure to make a cake that would give approval of licentiousness, judgement that ruined a flower shop for failure to participate in an action that would dishonour the divine ideal for marriage and a judgement approving of the firing of a beloved football coach for daring to kneel in prayer publicly.

Watching such actions and hearing the justification delivered for the decisions rendered, we feel much as did John when he saw “the great prostitute” revealed. John wrote, “One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, ‘Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk.’ And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: ‘Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth’s abominations.’ And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.

“When I saw her, I marvelled greatly” [REVELATION 17:1-6].

We can expect no more of those who are lost than what we observe. People filled with rage and bitterness will act with vituperation and malice. People filled with lust will seek approval of their actions. People filled with greed will seek to enrich themselves illicitly. No individual can rise higher than the highest thought guiding the heart. If the individual is fully identified as belonging to this earth, that person will be unable to think beyond earthly thoughts.

**WHEN WE JUDGE WE CONDEMN OURSELVES** — “In passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things” [ROMANS 2:1b]. Here is the twist that astounds us—we have the same nature as those who perform all the wicked acts catalogued in the preceding chapter! Judgement will be rendered for all mankind!

**ROMANS 2:1, 2**  
**WHEN JUDGING, WE ARE JUDGED**

Here is the issue facing us as Christians—we are sinners and we forget we are sinners. Christ gave His life as a sacrifice precisely because we are sinners—all of us. Perhaps we need to be reminded of the truth that “while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly” [ROMANS 5:6]. A verse following that declaration asserts, “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” [ROMANS 5:8]. We forget that Christ died for sinners. Jesus testified, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” [LUKE 5:31, 32].

To emphasise our sinful condition, we need but recall the Apostle’s lament concerning his own life. “We know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me” [ROMANS 7:14-20]. Remember, this is the Apostle Paul who uttered these doleful words.

Though we are redeemed by the mercies of Christ the Lord, we are yet sinners. Therefore, we should view outsiders trapped in their own sinful condition with great humility, for we are like them, only saved by the grace of God. We may be nice people, (even lost sinners can be nice people), but we have no claim on God’s goodness. We can rejoice in His mercy, but we have nothing of which we can boast. The Apostle was assuredly correct when he wrote, “Consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord’” [1 CORINTHIANS 1:26-31].

This knowledge enables us to understand what Jude meant when he wrote, “You, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh” [JUDE 20-23].

I am aware that commentators, especially commentators of an earlier era, sought to restrict Paul’s words to Jews who might be reading what he wrote. To be sure, there is a measure of validity in that view—he does address Jewish readers in the seventeenth verse. Nevertheless, the Apostle is stating a principle applicable to all who claim to follow the Saviour: Whenever we judge others, applying the tenets of the Law to them, we must know that we are pronouncing judgement on ourselves. Without God’s redeeming grace, we are under the same sentence as that we pronounce. Thus, we must show humility in the face of God’s righteousness.

When we judge others, our judgement is inevitably tainted with our own sinful nature. When we judge others, we project our own brokenness onto those we judge. Like children crying out, “It’s not fair!” we protest the inequity of seeing others do something while we are holding ourselves back. We feel keenly the unfairness because they appear to be getting away with something for which we know we would be judged. We inveigh against the act that is being performed because God doesn’t judge according to our schedule!

**ROMANS 2:1, 2**  
**WHEN JUDGING, WE ARE JUDGED**

In effect, by pronouncing judgement on another, or even by holding a judgemental attitude toward another, we promote ourselves to the position of God Himself. By such presumption, we challenge God's rightful place as Judge. We are declaring ourselves guiltless and thus able to pronounce righteous judgement. Of course, none of us have achieved that level of righteousness. As Christians, we are righteous in Christ. We have no righteousness of our own. We enjoy imputed righteousness, but we have no merit to which we may appeal. Therefore, in judging others, we expose our own guilt and pronounce judgement on ourselves.

**GOD'S JUDGEMENT** — "We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things" [ROMANS 2:2]. The Apostle acknowledges that God does judge wickedness when he writes this particular verse. However, the judgement of God is not as man would judge. In the remainder of this chapter, the Apostle outlines what God's judgement looks like.

The first point the Apostle makes is that *All who deserve to be judged will be judged* [VERSES 1-3]. God's judgement will not be according to the whims, the prejudices of sinful people; God's judgement will be according to the facts. It is of no consequence whether we are shocked or even disgusted by particular sins, even the sins listed in the first chapter of this Book; what is important is whether we are forgiven, whether we have turned to the Son of God in repentance—this is what will be taken into account.

The next point which Paul makes is that *Judgement will be according to one's actions* [VERSES 4-10]. Paul warns, "He will render to each one according to his works" [ROMANS 2:6]. This is a truth emphasised throughout the Word of God. For instance, Jesus teaches, "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" [MATTHEW 16:27]. These words anticipate what is stated in the Apocalypse when the Son of God says, "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done" [REVELATION 22:12].

Among the Proverbs is a similar warning. How sobering the Proverb that reads,

"Rescue those who are being taken away to death;  
hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter.  
If you say, "Behold, we did not know this,"  
does not he who weighs the heart perceive it?  
Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it,  
and will he not repay man according to his work?"

[PROVERBS 24:11, 12]

Note, in particular, the final strophe: "Will He not repay man according to his work?" We must either be judged on the basis of Christ's mercies, or we must be judged according to what we have done. I have never batted a thousand, and neither have you! For you, as for me, the saying is true, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" [ROMANS 3:23]. I do not want to attempt to persuade God to grant me absolution on the basis of my deeds. Yet, if any of us insist that God judge us, know that His judgement will be according to what you have done.

Yet, another principle of divine judgement is that *God's Judgement will be impartial* [VERSES 9, 10]. Jews have no special status in standing before God, and Gentiles have no particular disadvantage in the Judgement. The judgement for either will display no partiality. Those who will be judged will receive precisely what they deserve. The Judge is just and He is righteous; there will be no cause for complaint when judgement is rendered.



**ROMANS 2:1, 2**  
**WHEN JUDGING, WE ARE JUDGED**

I recall a fictional account published in a Christian magazine many years ago. The opening paragraphs were chilling in relating what the Bible says about that awful day when the lost are judged. This is the way the story begins. “Consciousness slowly broke through the haze. Jeremiah Delms remembered sitting in church. Every Sunday he’d come to hear his wife’s preacher. ‘Putting in my time,’ he had thought, smiling.

“But suddenly there was pain in his chest, shortness of breath, no breath.

“Then he had seen that great light—blinding, razing light hurling its rays like boulders. And he’d heard the voice. It sounded awful, like a train slamming into a truck, recapping his life, the whole sordid mess.

“He still wondered, ‘How had He known everything? Everything!’

“Jeremiah had knelt before the voice saying, ‘Your will be done,’ as if he had a choice. And it was over. He had agreed. Justice was demanded and exacted.”<sup>3</sup>

It was that thought that the lost will agree that they received justice that I found so chilling. God’s judgement will be impartial, and those judged will agree they received justice; but they will be damned all the same. We don’t need justice; we need mercy. When an individual stands before that Great White Throne, it will be because that person has demanded justice—and she shall receive justice. When God called me to account, I confessed, “Guilty as charged!” However, in confessing my guilt, I received mercy. Pleading “Not guilty,” would have ensured that I would receive justice, and no one can stand if we receive justice.

Paul makes a final point concerning the judgement of God, and the point is surprising. ***Judgement will be based on the Law of God*** [VERSES 12-16]. This passage presents an enigma of the Faith for many who seek the truth of God’s Word. Listen to the Apostle’s words. “All who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus” [ROMANS 2:12-16].

When people are judged by God, they will be exposed as guilty; each individual will have been weighed and found to have failed to meet God’s standard of perfection. The reason mankind fails to meet God’s standard is that God’s moral law is stamped on the heart of man. Paul’s statement of this truth is, “It is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified” [ROMANS 2:13]. Moreover, in emphasis of this truth, the Apostle states, “When Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts” [ROMANS 2:14, 15a].

Understand, we are not saved by the Law; in fact, we are condemned by the Law. The Apostle asks, “[What is the purpose of] the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one.

“Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

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<sup>3</sup> Mark R. Littleton, “The Greatest Story Ever Sold,” Moody Monthly, October 1983, pp. 58-61

**ROMANS 2:1, 2**  
**WHEN JUDGING, WE ARE JUDGED**

“Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith” [GALATIANS 3:19-24].

The Law exposes our fallen nature, confirming our inability to please God in our flesh. Knowing our depravity, we are driven to seek mercy; and when we seek mercy, we find mercy. This reveals the meaning of Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount when He cautioned disciples, “With the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye” [MATTHEW 7:2-5].

While there are professing Christians who imagine that they are obedient to the Law, they deceive themselves. They keep neither the moral code nor the ceremonial code. Jesus made this clear when He challenged all mankind during the Sermon on the Mount. You will recall His words, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” [MATTHEW 5:17-20].

Then, so that no one would miss the import of what He was saying, Jesus gave a couple of sobering examples of our failure to keep the Law. He said, “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire. So, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart” [MATTHEW 5:21-28].

Clearly, this business of anger contaminates more completely than any of us could imagine. Perhaps we congratulate ourselves that we have never murdered someone, but can we say that we’ve never hated a fellow Christian so intensely that we spoke ill of that person? Tragically, I hear such slanderous and censorious statements made against other believers more frequently than I would care to count!

Perhaps you congratulate yourself that you’ve never broken your marriage vows or been unfaithful to your spouse. However, can you honestly say that you’ve never harboured salacious or lascivious thoughts concerning someone else? When we look at pornography, when we allow our mind to go to what it would be to embrace someone to whom we are not married, when we permit ourselves to be entertained by sexually titillating shows or stories, we condemn ourselves.

**ROMANS 2:1, 2**  
**WHEN JUDGING, WE ARE JUDGED**

To emphasise how very serious this business of failure to maintain the Law could be, Jesus made what must be one of the most stunning statements imaginable. Jesus warned, “If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell” [MATTHEW 5:29, 30].

An interesting news item was published in recent week. The article reported that in the United States, white Christians are now a minority. I’m grateful for Hispanic, Black and Asian believers who share the Faith. I was privileged to begin my service before the Lord within the Black community in Texas, and I was privileged to serve among Filipino believers and later among Chinese believers in Dallas, in San Francisco and in Vancouver. However, immigration into the United States has increasingly transformed the face of society from Christian to predominantly non-Christian; increasingly, old-line churches, and in particular, evangelical churches, are decreasing in numbers and in their impact on society because they are not reaching out to what was once the fringes of society.<sup>4</sup>

What is true in the United States is equally true in contemporary Canadian society. Residents of both nations think of their nations as “Christian” though they resist being Christian. However, I would argue that neither the United States nor Canada were ever Christian, though the respective societies were heavily influenced by Christian ideals in years past. Christians, those who dared permit God to direct their lives, never did constitute a majority in society, though Christians have had influence out of proportion to their numbers. Consequently, our two nations were moralistic with Christian foundations. The foundations are now being destroyed, and the moralistic expression of who we are as a society is transmogrifying into a dramatically new moral expression. We are witnessing a tectonic shift in society as the new moralism prevails—a moralism with no foundation on which to rest. Never in the history of this great nation has it been possible that a believer who dares live as a child of the Living God to have the impact that is possible for such a believer in this day.

Living in a moralistic nation with Christian foundations serves only to condemn the individual who holds to his or her own righteousness. If all an individual possesses is a vague sense of self-defined goodness, that person surely will be judged by God, the Righteous Judge; and the Lord will use the Law to expose that person’s lack of righteousness. The tragedy is that no person can meet the demands of the Law. All alike fail when held to that perfect standard, just as Peter challenged his believing Jewish peers, “Why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear” [ACTS 15:10]?

All this brings us back to the text. “Therefore, you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things” [ROMANS 2:1, 2]. Let the people of God train themselves to cease judging their fellow saints. Let us rather “pursue what promotes peace and what builds up one another” [ROMANS 14:19 CSB]. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> “White Christians shift from majority to minority in US population: survey,” Fox News, September 7, 2017, <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2017/09/07/white-christians-shift-from-majority-to-minority-in-us-population-survey.html>, accessed 7 September 2017; Laretta Brown, “Pew: Growing Number of Americans Now ‘Spiritual but Not Religious,’” Sep 07, 2017, <https://townhall.com/tipsheet/laurettabrown/2017/09/07/pew-growing-number-of-americans-now-identify-as-spiritual-but-not-religious-n2378086>, accessed 7 September 2017