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Romans 2:1-5

"God's Word to Respectable Sinners"

December 15, 2021

All right. Let's open our Bibles this evening to Romans 2:1. Romans 2:1.

Paul had been in Corinth for what was - well, he's been there at least three times - his third missionary journey, headed for Jerusalem, and he wanted to get there by the Passover. He was bringing and carrying with him lots of money from lots of Gentile churches and accompanied lots of Gentile pastors, all of them headed to Jerusalem to help the poor there in hopes of reaching across the aisle to the Jewish believers, they being Gentile believers. Paul would spend three months here before he left. There was a woman who lived in one of the port cities of Cenchrea, which was one of the two ports that you find in Corinth. She was headed for Rome. She wanted a letter of recommendation. Paul knew a few folks there; he'd never been there. And so this was really the result of being asked to write a letter of recommendation which, by the way, is the last chapter of this book.

But as Paul began to write to a people he had never met, he wrote this great theological work of, really, the Bible about sin and salvation that few, I think, can match. Certainly it stands out as one of the best-thought-through books of the Bible in terms of what you should know about sin and you and God, and what God has done as a result. Paul had never been to Rome. He spends all of his time writing to people he'd never met. But yet he pours out his heart. He hopes to visit them soon. But because he had never met them, the first sixteen verses or so of chapter 1 are Paul's introduction of himself, which is a whole lot longer than you'll usually find. But he wants them to know about his view of himself and the calling of the Lord, his ministry motivation, his commitment to the gospel and all.

And then beginning in verse 18 of chapter 1, Paul begins his first topic - the doctrine of sin - and it really is the main doctrine through chapter 8. However, by the time we get to chapter 3:21, God begins to give us a solution. In fact, I think my favorite verses in the book of Romans are chapter 3:21-31. Until then it's kind of tough stuff to wade through and learn about, but yet it's important. However, January 12th & 19th we'll be there, okay? So mark that on your calendars right there.

Three topics, basically, for the entire book: sin; God's salvation - or the solution for our sin; and then God's sanctification - seeking to make you more like Himself when He gives you the victory over sin.

So, in chapter 1, Paul said to us, as he began to show how sin drags you down, he said God has not left us without a witness. We have the witness of His Person in the fact that He exists from creation itself. Everything you look at screams there has to be a Creator. So there is a witness outside of ourselves, if you will. And then God has also left a witness in our conscience within so that we are able to know the difference between good and evil. We don't even need a law for that. We just inherently know that because of what God has done in making us. Paul goes on to say the problem for man in sin is that when the Lord reveals Himself to man that, instead of turning to the Lord's revelation and seeking to know Him, man, because of sin, turns inward. He begins to formulate his own ideas of life. He finds himself at the center of his attention. He is self-serving. His religion is not God-centered. And so if that is allowed to continue, man just goes off the deep end. He gets into darkness, and he finds himself ripe for judgment, and his foolish heart becomes darkened, we read, and he lives by his own ideas. But he has to worship because God made man to worship. And so he begins to idol worship. He begins to pick things that are important to him and because he needs to get it out.

And so the consequences of sin and the slippery path downward that sin is involved in is found in chapter 1. In fact, last week we looked at (three times) the verse that says the Lord "gave them up." They didn't want to be with the Lord and so, at some point, the Lord just gives them what they want - a life without Him and all of the consequences that come with it. And so he evidenced a life that was given up as a proclivity towards sexual promiscuity and perversity - man serving his flesh. He's driven by it. And Paul wants to lay out very clearly how far man can fall when he sets God's revelation of Himself aside. Because a mind that rejects God will eventually be a mind that God rejects. And so you're allowed to then begin to do what you think is all right in your own hearts, but they are destructive to you. And at the end of chapter 1, as you go through that list, the revelation is there're a hundred ways to find yourself being given over to a life of unrighteousness without God. He ended, in verse 32, by saying to us (last week) that you can fall so far away from the Lord that even the revelation that man understands judgment is inevitable and is even fair, believes that that may very well be coming, he still continues in his sin; and not just himself. He takes pleasure in those who join him in it, who follow that same kind of lifestyle.

Now, as we start chapter 2 tonight, I think the outline is fairly straightforward. Chapter 1 talks about the downward spiral of sin; chapter 2 talks to the respectable sinner who reads chapter 1 and says, "That's not me. That's never me. I'm not like that at all." And then, at the end of chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3, the Lord then speaks to the religious sinner, the guy who claims, "Oh, more than good. I'm a religious person who cares lots about the things of God and does a lot of spiritual things." And for Paul's desire, he wants to be sure everyone, by the time they get done - whether you're a perverted sinner or a respectable sinner or a religious sinner, you're a sinner - and you've got to get to that part so that you can then go to Jesus and realize that He's the One that you need to follow.

And so tonight, as we begin chapter 2, God speaks to those who have read chapter 1 and concluded that's not them. "That's not me." We do know that God's assessment of us and our sin is not readily accepted by most people. We will agree with God that we sin because no one's perfect. But the gravity of sin and how deep it can take you down the road, if you will, is something that most folks will consider and say, "Well, that doesn't even apply to me in any sense." We agree sin should be judged, but we can hardly put each of those sins mentioned (like at the end of chapter 1) on the same level of severity as our good life. We don't do those kinds of things. Right? The concept that man often embraces regarding sin is he runs along the reasoning that we're all human, we're all going to fail, and God is God, God is going to forgive. And so we sin, He forgives. Everyone sins. What's He going to do? Judge all of us? No. I'm going to make myself land in the upper categories that'll get away with it, if you will.

So Paul, having just finished the indictment of God against gross and flagrant sin - which is kind of at the end of the line; that's where sin leads you; it leads you downhill, if you will; openly ungodly in so many ways - he now turns to talk to the respectable sinner who sees himself far above the behavior of chapter 1, the guy who worships insects and lives the immoral lifestyle. "That is not me." And so I argue against my own deep sinfulness before the Lord by trumpeting my own morality, which is, "I'm a lot better than that! I certainly don't go down that road. I believe there's a Creator. I'm good to my wife. I don't cheat on my taxes. I'm a pretty good guy, and I measure up" - far away from the decrepit description of those in chapter 1. But how easily the doors of the death chamber of self-righteousness open. Because that's what sin does. If you can still make a case for

yourself, you're really at a place where, in the end, God is not going to be able to do anything for you.

By the time Paul is done arguing - and we get to chapter 3:21 - God will declare that all of us are sinners without distinction. It doesn't really matter if you're a chapter 1, 2 or 3 sinner. Right? Rank yourself any way that you like. But the bottom line is if we don't go to Jesus and find our sins forgiven, we will never be welcome one day into glory. And Paul will establish these truths about sin one verse after the other so that he might just drive home the fact that we are sinners no matter where we place ourselves on the graph. When you get to verse 17 of this chapter, Paul will use the Jews as an example because the Jews had a lot to go on: we were chosen by the Lord, we're God's chosen people, we have the Law, we have history, we have so many things that we can trust in. And so they saw themselves, oftentimes, as far above the natural guy. "We're Jews! Those Gentiles, I don't even know how they're gettin' saved!" And so Paul will use that as an object illustration, specifically, just to drive home the same point.

In chapter 2, we are given several truths from the Lord about His judgment and how it is going to be applied to sinners. We're only going to look at two of them tonight, through verse 5. We're going to stop at verse 5. We'll look at the other four next week as we continue. But tonight the two things that we're going to see, in verse 2, are that the judgment of God is according to the truth - that's important - and that it follows an accumulated guilt and debt that we are well aware of. In other words, pile it up. At the end of your life, you're going to have to answer for it if you haven't gone to the Lord to be cleansed. Then next week and all we'll add the others to the list. But tonight the judgment of God is according to the truth.

Verse 1, "Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. But we know that the judgment of God is according to the truth against those who practice such things." We know that to be so. Well, here, start with this: here's what a hypocrite believes. A hypocrite believes that somehow he's in agreement with God that there are certain sins that are worthy of judgment, but they're not his sins. Notice what Paul says here in verse 1. It's important. If you can determine the sin in someone else's life - oh, that's sinful, that's wrong, that doesn't measure up - then you're guilty in your judgment because you prove that you know right from wrong. You look at someone else's life and go, "That's

wrong!" Well, if you can find that in their lives, you can find that in your own. It doesn't mean you're committing the same sin; it just means you have the same judgment. Right? So we saw in chapter 1 that within us God has placed a conscience which provides a sense of right and wrong. He's provided a world around us to convince us that He exists. And yet man tends to be naturally blind to his own condition because of sin. We can't see for the clouds, if you will. We can't see the forest for the trees. And so we find that unless God the Holy Spirit begins to convict us, we will never imagine that God will have to deal with us in terms of justice.

In fact, look at verse 3. Paul says, "And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?" And the answer is most people think that's exactly what will happen. Man refuses to fully admit he is sinful beyond measure, and so he defends himself, he excuses himself, and he usually does it in terms of degree. "Oh, I'm a sinner but not that bad. I lie but only when it's necessary." Right? "I fight back only when I'm right, which is always." When Dale Carnegie wrote his perennial best seller "*How to Win Friends & Influence People*" - I remember having to read it in college - in his people management chapter, he says that since folks rarely admit faults, it is pointless to criticize them for all you're going to do is lose a friend. You really aren't going to gain someone to the truth. And he's on to something because that's biblically correct. We don't like to admit sinfulness. We can find it in others (that's what verse 1 says), but we don't necessarily see it in ourselves. And yet here's the caveat: God judges by the truth even if you don't see it. And if you think you're gettin' away with it because you agree with Him about the sins of others but beg off when it comes to your own sins, we're going to have trouble. Al Capone, who was a notorious murderer, said of himself in the book that he wrote that he spent most of his life doing good; and all he got for it was abuse from the FBI. (Laughing) That was his quote. Really. Because the hypocrite believes he's one ahead of the game. He also feels that other men's sins are worse than his own. Find a drunk and you're not drunk..... "Look at me, I'm doing better." Find an adulterer, and you are not.....find a murderer to compare yourself to, and you begin to pride yourself on your fine standing and your respectability. The problem is, the serious error is you're using the wrong standard to evaluate yourself. Right? You're not standing next to Jesus! You're standing next to somebody who's a sinner. He's just chapter 1; you're chapter 2. But you're chapter something, and you're going to need help. And that, so often, is the issue.

So the sin of the hypocrite is highlighted by the fact that he's indignant about the shortcomings of others while he's entirely indulgent with his own sin. Now that has nothing to do with all of the perversion of chapter 1 because all chapter 1 does is say, "Here's sin, and let's go to the bottom of the barrel and see what that can leave you like." But we go to chapter 2. Now someone's arguing, "I'm doing pretty good."

David was extremely sinful in how he dealt with Uriah. He killed Bathsheba's husband so that he could sleep with her; he got her pregnant, got this guy out of the way. Self-righteous, though, in the judgment of others. When Nathan came to him, there in 2 Samuel 12, and he told him a story about someone who had taken something that belonged to somebody else, David was so indignant, you will read the words, "he was greatly aroused against the man," and he said, "Kill him! And then before you kill him, make him pay four times what he stole." And Nathan goes, "Yeah, that's you!" And then David went, "Oh....." In one way he saw himself more righteous than the one he's been presented. On the other hand, he wasn't really willing to admit it was him. You know, the old adage is we hate our sins most when we see them in others. And that is so often, unfortunately, the case.

Hypocrisy is claiming enough wisdom to see the faults of those around you and claiming a lack of wisdom to see you own. And that's exactly what we read here. So, verse 2 tells us that, though he may put on airs with others, the hypocrite will not fool God because "the judgment of God is according to the truth." We can spend all day comparing ourselves with others: how I'm better than you, how I tried harder than you, how I gave more than you, how you talked a good game but didn't come through. There're a hundred ways for us to promote ourselves, if you will, over others, but we're not going to be able to fool God. He knows all. And that little voice in the mind of the respectable sinner that tells him he's okay is lying to him because the judgment of man is never quite square with the truth. God sees all, and so it is important that you and I see things from God's perspective because our hearts are desperately wicked and, man, are we quick to defend ourselves.

Paul wrote to the Hebrews and said, in chapter 4:13, that when it comes to the Lord, "there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account." The guy in verse 1 says, "Well that's not me. I see what you're doing, but that's not me." And the Lord says, "And I see what you're doing, and don't you think," verse 3, "that you're going to get away

with it just because, on the one hand, you agree but, on the other hand, you continue." Man has high hopes for himself, believing that God sees him as he sees himself. And that's the problem with sin. We've got to see us the way God sees us, not the way we think we should be seen. He's the One who sets the standard. Right? "God, I'm a good guy. You should recognize that in me. Most people do. I hope You do, Lord." And yet when the LORD spoke to Samuel (1 Samuel 16), He said in choosing what would be David, "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." Ultimately, this book's got to get you to think about sin in terms of what God says. Right? So that by the time you get to chapter 3:21 we can say, "Oh, isn't it good that God has given us a righteousness we can't earn ourselves?" He knows the worst about us, and He has given to us all that we need.

A hypocrite believes that if he agrees with God about the sins of others, he'll be fine. He feels like the sins of others are worse than himself. And he thinks he's going to get away with it. Notice verse 3 where he says, "Do you think this, O man?" and the word "think" is the word for "logic" or the word for "calculation" or "estimation." Do you really think God is going to treat you differently than someone else because you think they're worse than you are? Do you really think that's the way it works? When God doesn't need any help, He sees the motives, He sees He has the facts, He sees the facts beyond the behavior, He knows the motivation. He doesn't need anyone to come and testify on your behalf or anyone's behalf. He doesn't need a jury or witnesses or anyone to help decide the case. He's the Witness, He's the Jury, He's the Judge. Do you really think you're going to get away with it because you think you're better than somebody else? "I'm not chapter 1," and the Lord says, "Okay, you're chapter 2. You're still in big trouble." The hypocrite will discover that his sin will indeed be found out, that we're all sinners, that we all need salvation.

Remember that story of the prodigal son, one that we know very well. But have you ever considered the reaction of the older brother in the story? Pretty interesting. Right? If there was ever a pious fraud, he was it. He stayed home, but his heart wasn't in it, and there's certainly nothing about love or respect. When the young boy came back - when the prodigal returned - he was so angry (his older brother) that this repentant young man would be received back and fully forgiven that he even refused to participate in the party his dad was going to throw for the fact that he had returned. He just wouldn't even go. He said to his

father, and I'll quote out of Luke 15:29-32, " 'Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this son of yours' " (and by the way, he's not calling him his brother anymore) " 'came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.' And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.' " But the older brother wouldn't even go. Why? Because he was all about chapter 2. He saw his brother as a chapter 1. I know I'm puttin' this on the lowest shelf, but you get the picture. Right? They're chapter 1, chapter 2 arguments again. "I'm a chapter 2 guy. I don't see why we couldn't have a party for me. Why didn't I get the celebration?" Now he comes back, and he barely says, "Sorry." He wouldn't even identify with his brother. The younger brother had lots to be guilty for, but the elder had far more to be guilty for: his pride, didn't see his own sin, didn't see any need for forgiveness, saw himself as earning and being almost in a position where the father owed him. But that's the battle that we fight because the hypocrite feels that somehow God's going to treat him differently, and he doesn't have to come under the same rules.

When the Pharisee, there in Luke 18, went to the synagogue to pray with the publican, the Lord, in introducing the parable, said that "He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others." Not only did they say of themselves, "I'm right with God," they looked down their noses at everybody else. But you know what the Lord said about his prayer? That he "prayed with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like that guy over there. I give tithes, and I go to the temple, and I do all the right things. Thank You, God, I am not like those guys.' " And the Lord said, "He prayed with himself." He didn't go away justified; he just went away. Because the hypocrite truly believes somehow he's on a different plateau. The man was a hypocrite, and God knew him. And somehow he walked out of the synagogue that day feeling good about himself, and that's the problem. How erroneous our judgments about our own sin when they are made in comparison to others that are sinners as well. The only way you come up with the right solution: go stand next to Jesus. The Father said, in Matthew 5:48, Sermon on the Mount, you want to get on your own, "Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect." Oh, that's a great standard. Well, that'll put you in your place, where you need to be. It'll put you right in line for a need to be saved.

God is very good, but He's also a Judge. We read in Romans 8:32 that "He did not spare His own Son." He sent Him for our behalf. In fact, in Isaiah 28:21, the prophet, in writing about God's work of judgment, he called it "strange" and "unusual," and then he compared the fact that God longs to be merciful and gracious, but He also has to, in holiness, judge sin. So God's in this very difficult spot. He wants to give you life, but He can't look away if you're not comin'. He wants to redeem you, but He can't do that if you're not willing to come and respond. And yet He holds back judgment as long as He can because His target audience is you getting to Him. Why He waits so long.

The conclusion here is simple: don't think for one minute you're going to escape the judgment of God for sin, even if you conclude that your sin is of far less consequence than the guy from chapter 1. In fact, if the truth be known, the only reason you haven't fallen into judgment yet is that God is good, and He waits for you to come to your senses and hear His voice, and listen to His Word so that you might turn to His Son and be saved. Because that's the end game, that's the whole desire. And so you find God's great patience.

We read, in verse 4, "Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?" Without exception, every person who has ever lived has experienced the riches of God's goodness. Because if they hadn't, they'd be dead. God would just (Pastor Jack claps his hands).....that's it. How can you stop Him? His "forbearance." The word means "to be tolerant, to delay judgment, to hold back something." God has been good to us by holding back what we deserve. The word "longsuffering," at least in the Greek here, is a "patience with an emphasis on the length of time that you're tolerating something." The emphasis is on He's just bored with us for day after week after month after year. People we pray the Lord just deal with. He will but not in our time.

We were on the freeway yesterday in a driving rainstorm going over the Grapevine, 70 mph winds. It was like your car was going sideways. And some clown went by us, honestly, doing 110, and he was fishtailin'. And I said to my wife, "I hope the cops get him." (Pastor Jack laughs) I thought.....I looked down, I was doing 78, and I thought, "Just him, though, Lord. Not me." (Laughing) Sin is that way, isn't it? It's just.....the Lord....I think he's okay. We trust that he is. But it was such a quick thought, you know.

God's goodness has caused Him to delay His punishment to us because He tolerates it so that we might find Him. That's what He wants. Every breath you take, every idle word you speak, every sinful thought that fills your mind screams for judgment, and yet it is the goodness of God that does immediately not strike out, but He grants you another day. That's how we should see sin. No way else. Forget about the levels and the comparisons of one to another. God holds back judgment. He allows the rain to fall on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45). He is patient. He is long-waiting. He wants to give you life. The earth is full of the goodness of the LORD. That's what we read in Psalm 33:5. The LORD's goodness fills the earth. But here's His goodness: He waits, He waits. Psalm 52:1 says this, "Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man? The goodness of God endures continually." In Psalm 145:9, "The LORD is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works." That's the character of God. Why? Because He wants you in. He wants you back. He wants to save you. He wants to deliver you. It's why His Son came. He wants all to be saved. And you can interpret anything you want by the way people get away with murder. God is waiting because God wants to give life.

But the hypocrite thinks somehow he's in a different category, and it's the lesson he has to learn. What he forgets is that, though his attitude in verses 1 and 2 might be to just be blind to his own need for God's goodness and mercy, Paul said he shouldn't despise the fact that God is patient and good because it just gives us more time. It's not approval. It's not lack of capability to act if He so chooses. It isn't that God doesn't care. It's because He does.

In 579 B.C., when the troops of Nebuchadnezzar blew into Jerusalem in the second wave of attacks (that we've been talking about on Sunday morning), if you go back and you read through Daniel and some of the prophets, there were plenty of people that were left in town after that second attack; and they survived it, left behind. Imagine that, somehow, and they even said out loud, "We must be God's favorites because we escaped the attack, and we are not as bad as those who were taken away." They never confessed their sins. They never repented to the LORD. They never looked to God for deliverance. And eleven years later, they were destroyed. But for eleven years they lived with this idea that somehow they were in a position that caused God to give them preferential treatment. But they didn't.

Divine patience, when persistently rejected or neglected, leads to certain judgment. It's just the way it is. God doesn't run out of patience, but He said "This is enough." God spared Adam and Eve. They didn't die immediately. They got

to hear the promise of a Savior to come. He waited 120 years while Noah built an ark, even though the thoughts in the hearts of every man were only wicked continually (Genesis 6:5). For 120 years, nobody on the earth was thinking good things, doing good things. And God waited.

I think we look around sometimes and say to ourselves, "How long is the Lord able to wait before He just says, 'This is enough!'" I've been feeling like that for twenty years. Maybe you have as well. But it's hard to understand the grace of God that waits. He waited for forty years as His people wandered in the wilderness, waiting for them to repent. If you're away from the Lord, I would say this to you: tonight He waits for you. It's just what He does.

So, the mind of a self-righteous moralizer doesn't understand the nature and the extent of his sin. They can recognize wickedness in others but immediately see their situation as less sinful. And, as a result, they feel immune from the judgment that is to come. They miss the truth that adultery is sin in the heart long before it's sin in the bed. Because it's an issue of the heart. Sin is an issue of the heart. The self-righteous person is blind to his own faults and doesn't see the parallel that everyone has sinned. I think often respectable sinners tend to be the most judgmental people on the planet. But Hell will be full of goody-goodies. (Pastor Jack laughs.)

The hypocrite believes God takes sides. And if you take God's side in the big things, He'll let you off the hook on the small things. Not so. And he views the kindness and the tolerance and the patience of God as approval but not as a chance to repent. He makes the wrong assumption.

So "the judgment of God is according to the truth." And, again, the distinction between chapter 1 and chapter 2.

Verse 5 says, "But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." What does the hypocrite face? Not escape. Because if he continues with his heart-hardness, refusing to repent of his sin, and God extends his days with patience and kindness so that he can come to his senses, if he does not, God will bring before him all of the judgment he has compiled, saved up, stored up for himself since the first time that he was able to understand what he should have done. In other words, you're not getting away with anything. The

books are going to be balanced. And imagine what a shocking day it will be when a respectable sinner, who has enjoyed God's gifts of kindness and tolerance and longsuffering for many years, doesn't repent of his sin and then goes to stand before his Maker. And how surprised he'll be. If you read the description of the sin of Sodom - which is written in many places - but Ezekiel wrote this about Sodom (Ezekiel 16:49-50), "This was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. They were haughty and committed abomination before Me; therefore I took them away as I saw fit." The whole life was one of, "We don't need any help." They were extended for years, their lifestyle, if you will. God didn't approve; He judged.

When Jesus is speaking about the end times, He said, in Luke 17:28, "It was just like that in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. That's how it'll be when the Son of Man is revealed." In other words, for some, this piling up will last their whole lives, but eventually the scales come out, and the punishment meets the weight, if you will, of the sin. If the goodness of God is not leading you to repentance, then each day that you live and breathe and sit in the sunshine is just another day where you drop it into the bucket that is marked "Future Indignation." Because God is fair. He balances all things out. One day the dam will burst of God's longsuffering. And only by coming to Jesus in faith can you pass from judgment to life. That's what John said, "You have passed from judgment to life." The can can be emptied. The cup of indignation Jesus drank (Mark 10:38). Isn't that what we read? He took the cup of indignation. It was the indignation of your sins. It was the bottle you've been filling up all of your life. And the Lord said, "Let Me drink that and get you off the hook." He drank the cup of His indignation against us. Jesus said this (John 5:24), "I say to you if you hear My words and believe in Him who sent Me, you have everlasting life. You will not come into judgment. You've passed from death to life." In Romans 1:18 we read that the wrath of God is being revealed every single day. Man was driven from the Garden. A generation died in the wilderness. Battles were fought for years on end in the book of Judges. And man lost as God was put aside. Every man faced physical death. It's a horror. And, like I said, if chapter 1 shows how far sin will drag you down that eventually you'll be left in a place where God will just abandon you, leave you, to live your own devices, then chapter 2 says the final day of judgment that awaits those who have spent their whole lives refusing the Lord is going to be a day of horror. And the only

hope and solution is that you let the Lord drink that cup of indignation for you. You've filled the cup up; He's willing to empty it.....if you'll let Him.

Man often sees God's goodness and tolerance and longsuffering as approval, and so he takes comfort in the fact that..... "May the Lord strike me dead!" And then He doesn't. "Well, see? Must be okay." I don't think you can wear out His patience in a day. So I doubt you're going to be able to push His buttons.

There was a serial killer years ago in Philadelphia. His name was Gary Heidnik. And he lured prostitutes and street women into his home, raped them, tortured them and then mutilated them. And this went on for years. And when he was finally discovered, they found body parts in refrigerators. Two women had been chained in the cellar for over twenty years. Obviously this guy was insane. But what was interesting was the outrage from the public was not at him but at the police who said, "Well, you know, we've reported before that there were noises going on in the house, but the police had no probable cause." The point is that when people hear a level of wickedness that they can't tolerate, they demand immediate action. "Kill that guy! Forget about givin' him a trial. String him up!" I kind of like that thought. It's the way I tend to react to people that are caught in the act of doing these horrible things. But what's interesting is when we get to God and us, we want just the opposite. "Do not string me up." Right? "Just leave me be." I don't give God the same privilege that I demand of action in my own life. The only reason is that we feel our sins are excusable, forgetting, in His sight, the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). It's just that it doesn't change from person to person.

When Jesus had that discussion, in Luke 13, with a group of people that were really trying to make an argument with Him that there were some sins that should be dealt with right away and other people that ought to be able to get away with it, and that there was horrible and not so horrible; and there was, at that time, when He was talking to them, they were talking about the Galileans whose blood had been mixed by Pilate into the sacrifices (there was some horrible treatment by Pilate of these Gentiles). And Jesus said to them, "Do you suppose that these Gentiles" (who were grabbed by Pilate, forced into death and the sacrifices) "were worse sinners than somebody else?" And Jesus said, "I just want to tell you that's not the case. But unless you repent, you'll all perish." In other words, you can find gradations of sin, but that's really not the issue. The issue isn't am I a chapter 1- chapter 2 sinner; the issue is am I a sinner, and do I need repentance? And Jesus went on, and He said, "How about those eighteen people on the tower in Siloam that

fell over, and it killed them. Do you think they were worse sinners than those who dwelt in Jerusalem?" And again He said, "No! They didn't get punished for their wickedness and somehow you survived because you're not so wicked. But unless you repent, you'll all perish." The same thing will happen to everyone. There's no escape in that context. So, contrary to the presupposition that those who suffered greatly were the extremely evil sinners - worse than others - Jesus said, "No way." In fact, He would say, "The amazing thing is that you're still alive, and you're sinners." That's the amazing thing. God hasn't struck me dead, yet. Thank You, Lord.

Verse 5 tells us that the wrath of God will be deserved because it is according to our hard and impenitent hearts. Right? In verse 4 we are told God is patient and good and longsuffering for one purpose - to bring us to repentance, to bring us to a place where we can turn in our hearts to the Lord. But verse 5 says that God's judgment will be upon our behavior, upon our heart, and the fact that we wouldn't repent and wouldn't turn to Him. And so day by day we "are treasuring up for ourselves wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God," when the judgment day comes.

Now there's one thing otherwise that we should read in verse 5, and that is that God's wrath will be proportional to our sin. We've been making this list - worse in chapter 1, not so bad in chapter 2. But the Bible certainly teaches that the sinner who sins much will be punished much; the sinner who sins less, punished less. The one who knows less, punished only for what he understands. The individual who hasn't heard the gospel will die only for what he knows or whatever has only been revealed to him. Jesus said, in Luke 12:47-48, "The servant who knew his master's will, and didn't prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more."

So you are treasuring for yourself for what you deserve. There are certainly, it would seem to me, in the Bible, stages in Hell, depths of Hell, depths of suffering. God is good. You would expect that from the Lord. But the bottom line is salvation can only come from one place. So we're all sinners, and there's no.....I grew up as a Catholic.....there's no mortal sin, venial sin with God. You remember that if you guys were Catholic? You know, the bad one and the okay one. Right? That doesn't exist. Sin is sin, and judgment is judgment. Will we be punished according to our

sins? Yes. To that degree as well. Whatever we've stored up in our lives before the Lord. However, the issue is one of standing before the Lord and having to answer for ourselves. I find, verse 5, the words "treasuring up for yourself." The word "treasuring up," there, is an interesting word because it describes a greedy individual who likes to hoard things, like, "This is mine, and this is mine, this is mine, and I'll take one of those, and this belongs to me." But this time, he's collecting judgment. He's still busy going forward, but what he is storing up is going to destroy him. So every enjoyment of his blessings without thanks, every word or thought for self and the hatred of others, every year of grace that just passes and he doesn't get saved, every moment where the grace of God is ignored and refused, all of them add to the box, add to the cup of indignation.

Finally, verse 5 says this judgment is certain. There will certainly come a day when the wrath of God and His righteousness will bring judgment upon man. Abraham knew that well enough, early on in the book of Genesis, when the LORD was headed for judgment there in Sodom (Genesis 18). It was Abraham who questioned the LORD's intentions, asked Him about, "What if there are ten righteous in the city? Would You destroy the city for the ten?" And the LORD said, "No. No." And Abraham said, "Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Oh, He's going to do right, but He's also going to judge. He will do right, but He's going to judge. If God's wrath is deserved by us and is proportionate to our sin, and as sure as you can put it on the calendar, and it is just, even when, for now, you can find others that seem to be worse off than we are, we're not going to be able to avoid this day of judgment. The answer is simple: you've got to go to Jesus who took the cup, drank it for you, so you can place your hope in Him. He'll deliver you. But whether you're the horrible sinner kind, the mass murderer (the fellow that we described there in Philadelphia), or you're a chapter 2 good, upstanding young man with a suit on who does everything right and takes care of his family, and wins the city council man of the year, you need a Savior. You need a Savior. And the sin will always be that somehow my behavior is sufficient to please God when He says it is not.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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