

✠ *In the Name of Jesus* ✠

If you are a nice person or a generous person, this text may be for you. If you practice tolerance toward humans and kindness toward animals, this text may be for you. If you have been a good worker, giving your boss or your clients a full day's work for a full day's wage, this text may be for you. If you tell the truth, this text may be for you. If you haven't gotten a speeding or parking ticket in the last 20 years, this text may be for you. If you pay your taxes and vote in the elections, this text may be for you. If you have been faithful to your spouse, this text may be for you. If you're under 18 and your parents describe you as "a good kid," this text may be for you. If you attend Sunday worship at least 45 times a year, this text may be for you. If you ever look at what others do and say, "Oh, that's terrible! How can they do that?" this text may be for you because you are COMFORTABLE IN JUDGMENT.

I hope you can see where I'm going with all this. But if you don't see it yet, come with me into chapter 1 of Romans, the apostle Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome. After giving his readers the good news that Jesus, Son of God and descendant of King David, is our Savior, Paul switches to the bad news: the people of the world are making themselves worthy of God's wrath by all their obviously evil behaviors. It started with their stubborn refusal to acknowledge his eternal power as the one who created them. They preferred to worship created

things in the world, so the Creator turned them over to sexual sins. When they wouldn't repent of these sins, he turned them over to a worthless mind that leads to senselessness and turning on one another and harming others in every imaginable way. When you read chapter 1 of Romans, it sounds like Paul is describing the people of our day.

This is why I started by asking you whether you are morally above average. Paul knew that not everyone gives themselves over to every kind of sin. Most people, in fact, draw a firm line between what they will allow and what they won't abide. Is that okay—to have a moral compass? Well, sure. But most people make the mistake of thinking that, because they have morality in some areas, they are better than those who are immoral in those same area. These are the people Paul is especially addressing in Romans 2, those who in their heart of hearts look down on others because others don't behave as well as they do in some way. Most people expect God to give them a little credit for doing things right at least occasionally. The apostle Paul, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wants to help us break free of such thinking. So here come the hammers.

In our text Paul writes: *<sup>1</sup>Therefore, [I say to] every person who continues to judge [others]: you are without any excuse.* We might object, "Yeah, I'm not perfect. But I want God to acknowledge that I don't shoot up schools or restaurants. I don't force anyone to join my religion. I'm not judging others.

But can't I at least look down on them for being stupid?" As a matter of fact, that is judging others. That's what makes all the preaching about tolerance and acceptance in our society utterly laughable. If you don't accept what society wants to tolerate, they won't accept you. They're so judge-y. They are no different from those who would do harm to America because they see our nation as immoral, ripe for God's judgment. On a certain level, they're right. But as soon as they want to carry out God's judgment as his agent, instead of waiting for God to act, they are over the line, condemning themselves by their judgment. We fall into the same camp whenever we think that our superior morals give us an edge with God now and on Judgment Day. Paul is correct about everyone who is COMFORTABLE IN JUDGMENT when he writes: <sup>1</sup>*You are without any excuse.*

*This is true because you condemn yourself by the very things by which you judge the other person, because you 'the judge' are doing the same things [the other person is doing]. "That's not true. That's not true. I'm a nice a person. I help people. I pray." Ok, sometimes you make yourself look good, to others and to yourself. But at other times you still break the Commandments. And Paul writes: <sup>2</sup>*we know that God's judgment on those who continually do things such as these is arrived at on the basis of the facts.**

"Come on, Paul. You're being too harsh. We aren't promiscuous. We don't sell drugs, not to children anyway. We don't weave in and out of traffic dangerously." True, but you have had sexual thoughts for someone other than your spouse, thoughts which you indulged for a while. You have made use of food or alcohol or substances or shopping or gambling or TV to escape emotional pain, rather than taking your emotional pain to the Lord in prayer and to a professional or a pastor for counseling. You have raged at inconsiderate drivers. <sup>3</sup>*And do you think, you the person who judges those doing such things as these and who does the same things yourself, that you will escape God's judgment?* How does thinking this way make any real sense, even apart from what the Bible teaches?

"Well, God can't really hate me or every little bad thing I do." Oh? Why not? "Because when I have told little white lies or snitched a little treat or been a little naughty, God did not strike me down with lightning right then and there." Have you done that? Have you asked God to strike you with lightning or send you some other sign to turn you away from evil if he didn't like the path you were on? That's pretty gutsy when God has already written down in the Bible what he wants us to do and what he doesn't want us to do. And it's an even bigger mistake to think that because God didn't send you an immediate

consequence for doing what you knew was wrong, that somehow he was okay with what you were doing. <sup>4</sup>*Are you making light of the rich kindness God is showing you by patiently holding back [his judgment]?* Oh, my dear fellow human being, don't misinterpret the holding back of God's judgment on you as his approval of what you do wrong. The goal of God's patience with us sinners is to give us time to repent. God doesn't force anyone to repent by zapping us every time we do wrong. That wouldn't be repentance anyway. That would be behavior modification. God wants genuine repentance, 'a change of mind about sin' accompanied by 'a change of action.' This is why he tries to lead each sinner to repent both by threats of judgment and by his patient love and by the trouble he sends. Are you really <sup>4</sup>*ignorant of the fact that God in his goodness is trying to lead you to repentance?*

If you don't notice God's kindness as such, you will probably remain unrepentant. Or as Paul writes: <sup>5</sup>*As a result of your stubbornness—your unrepentant heart—you are storing up for yourself anger in the day of anger when God reveals his just judgment.* Even if most people in the world are living as if there will be no Judgment Day, it's still coming. On that Day, God <sup>6</sup>*will repay each person according to what he has done.* "Batta-boom! That's what I've been trying to tell you! I'm a nice person most of the

time. I give to charities. I check on my elderly neighbor. This has to count for something. And you just quoted Paul saying that God will repay each person according to what he has done. If I'm good enough, God will have to let me into heaven."

Well, actually, you're right. And the apostle Paul agrees with what you're saying. In fact, that's the path into heaven that Paul is exploring when he writes: <sup>7</sup>*On the one hand, [God] will give in return eternal life to those who continually seek glory and honor and no corruption according to the standard of 'persistence in doing what is good.'* So, have you persisted in doing good, all the time, without fail? Have you sought glory and honor by doing what is right all the time, without fail? I ask, because that's what it takes. You've already admitted that you haven't been perfect. I appreciate your honesty. But if we're being as honest as God, we have to admit that God should not reward our behavior with eternal life. We have fallen short of persistently doing what is good.

But the bad news isn't over yet. Paul writes, <sup>8</sup>*On the other hand, boiling anger [will be given] to those who out of selfish ambition disobey even what is true while also continually giving in to evil* {Literally: *obeying what [God says] is not right*—an odd way of saying 'giving in to evil,' as if evil is a commander and we are following orders}. What should

we get? Boiling anger. The anger that we have stored up for ourselves on the day of anger, Judgment Day.

But it gets worse. <sup>9</sup>*Tribulation and distressing trouble [will come] on every living human being who continues to do the things that are wrong, both the Jew first and the Greek.* Tribulation is like getting squeezed from both sides.

Distressing trouble is like getting pushed down by a heavy weight above us. Very unpleasant. So why, you might ask, does the Jew get it before the Greek? Well, they both get it, but for about 2000 years (from the time he selected Abraham until the great day of Pentecost) God did give his Jewish people certain advantages that he did not give the Greeks and other Gentiles.

“Okay, but I don’t want tribulation and distressing trouble. Can’t I just try harder to please God? Will that be enough?” Paul answers. <sup>10</sup>*Glory and honor and peace [will come] to everyone who continues to do the things that are good.* “Oh, we’re back to this again, huh? I have to always continue doing good in order to get into heaven on my own record, huh?” Yes. And this is true for *both the Jew first and the Greek*, <sup>11</sup>*for God never shows partiality.* He judges fairly and justly. If you can be perfect, he will most assuredly reward you with an earned place in heaven.

“But I can’t be perfect. I know—I’ve tried. I keep falling short. And Judgment Day is closer than ever. What am I going to do?”

How about we go back to the verse (v 4) that pointed to God’s kindness. Paul wrote that God’s kindness leads us to repentance. God really is giving us time to turn away from sin, to turn toward him, to reconcile with others, to plead for his mercy, to be COMFORTABLE IN JUDGMENT on God’s terms. In his kindness God sent his own Son Jesus to substitute himself for us. In his kindness God counts Jesus’ perfect life as if we lived it. In his kindness God counts Jesus’ death on the cross, even the forsaking of Jesus by God, as if we endured it, as if all our sins have been atoned for. In his kindness God didn’t exclude anyone. He wants everyone to come home to heaven at the time of God’s choosing. And that’s what he will give to everyone who trusts in Jesus as Savior.

Until then, it’s okay to repeat to others what God says about sin. Right is still right, and wrong is still wrong, but because God says so, not because people are trying to make themselves look better than someone else. Right is still right, and wrong is still wrong, which allows us to see how much we need Jesus. But we have Jesus. He has definitely redeemed us. Because of Jesus we are ready to stand before God in the judgment.