**Romans 2 – Why We Need To Not Play God**

We have all experienced it. The person who has slandered us, gossiped about us, or simply in the corner with their group complaining, griping, criticizing, pointing fingers, at the church, at people, and that includes Christians whom they think don’t measure up or who they think don’t quite get it.

In some cases, these talkers like to spend their time being negative about things that they don’t agree with. And it is not constructive, but destructive. Finger pointing is an easy thing to do and we will see why it better to let God be God.

We are beginning a series in the Book of Romans but one that will be a little different than going through the entire book. The reason is that we have studied portions of Romans at other times. **(i.e., Rom. 1:18-31; Rom. 5 (portions of it); Rom. 6; Rom. 7 (which we will look at in this series; Rom. 12)**.

This study will be practical as well as theological. We begin today in **Rom. 2:1-11**. We are going to talk about God’s character, specifically His patience and a problem that we have in our country and the world - that of judging others in an unfair and wrong manner. So, let’s dive into this text.

This passage follows on the heels of **Rom. 1:18-32**, where we see man’s descent into sin and its results. We read some of the things Paul notes in those verses, and we will see a few momentarily, and we say to ourselves, “I would never do that” or at least “I would never think that.”

The problem is, we all battle sin. That is the gist of **Rom. 6**. As believers we have victory over sin’s power and control in our lives if we truly live out who we are in Christ. On the flipside, there are people, and sometimes Christians, who point a finger at others who are followers of Jesus or are struggling Christians and they judge them. Paul has words for anyone today who may be guilty of that kind of action.

What we are saying is not to get anyone feeling guilty but more a preventative to keep us from falling and stumbling. That is the thought behind what we are looking at today.

Mankind, according to **Rom. 1:18**, has chosen to suppress the truth of Who God is. **Rom. 2** addresses those people, both Jew and non-Jews, though there is a predominant thought that he was talking more so to the Jews **(Rom. 2:17)** who thought that since they had not committed, in their minds, any of the sins mentioned in **Rom. 1**, they were somehow okay, outside of God’s righteous judgment of sin. Paul shows how mistaken we can be when we play the comparison game when it comes to spirituality.

We begin in **Rom. 2:1**. The first point I want to make is this:

**1) Be careful who we point fingers at (vss. 1-3).** Paul says that those who judge others are **“without excuse”** **(vs. 1)**. The word rendered **“excuse”** means that whatever think or says **“cannot be defended, it is inexcusable.”** Paul, and I agree with this assessment given by some, is dealing with self-righteous people in this part of Romans, who in particular are not Christ followers but as we shall see, there is application for us who are.

**We can relate to this:** No matter what we come up with to excuse our sins, which even Christians can do, or to point out the faults of others, God says that approach is inexcusable because the reality is we all sin, and sometimes we commit the same sins that we are noting in others. We can purposely and easily overlook our struggles while making note of the failures of others. Paul is challenging that way of thinking.

A key to understanding where Paul is coming from is found in the word **“judges”** in **vs. 1**. As used here, this Greek word means **“to censure, who pass judgment on the deeds and words of others.” Joseph Thayer** points out that it speaks of **“those who judge severely (unfairly), finding fault with this or that in others.”**

It is easy to point fingers, to see the sins in others while at times excusing our own. Maybe we don’t lie, but we gossip. Maybe we don’t steal, but we are lazy (laziness is a sin). Maybe we judge others for not being in church, but while here we are not listening to what is being taught or what we are singing. Maybe we do not slander, but we listen to it when someone puts another person down.

Paul is clear in **vs. 1** that when we pass judgment on another we are **condemning (to judge worthy of punishment, judge someone guilty)** ourselves, because we do sin, and we can probably look at **Rom. 1** and find a sin we may have been guilty of. Look quickly with me at **vss. 29-31**.

**Vital:** Plus, think about this. If I have enough knowledge to point out where others have failed, then I have the same knowledge to honestly look at my life and see where I need to improve and deal with sin.

Jesus says that those who point fingers **“practice” (vs. 1)** or do, the very same things that we are judging, if we are a finger pointer. In the context, Paul is dealing with those who do not know the Lord but are religious. But, as we have noted, what he says can apply to Christians as well, I believe, from the text. Mankind does what he does because he is born a sinner and has rejected Christ **(vs. 2)**, thus God’s judgment is right and just.

In **vs. 3** Paul reminds us that those who see themselves as righteous, or better than others, whatever it may be, will not escape God’s judgment. This is speaking specifically of people without Jesus in their life.

The word for **“escape” (avoid)** here is connected to the future judgment of sinners when they stand before God, or when they slip into eternity without Him. Some people obviously thought that they were good enough to not face judgment from God, because they were better than others. In **vs. 3** Paul asked whether those who point fingers **“suppose” (presume, conclude)** get a free pass from judgment.

**Practical:** Here are some applicable truths for us who are Christ followers. We know that if we are a believer in Christ, there are times that He disciplines us because He loves us **(Heb. 12)**. Our sins have been totally forgiven, and God keeps no record of when we do things we should not. That gives us, though, no excuse, to sin and act in ways that are not God honoring, including finger pointing.

**Practical:** Remember that Paul is talking about condemning others and overlooking our sins, being self-righteous. We are to be aware of someone’s character but not to become a self-righteous judge of them.

**Practical:** You and I who are Christians will not face judgment. But we must remember that the way we live here can be either a positive or negative influence on others. We must let others see Jesus in us. But, since God knows everything, He does know when we sin, and He, because He loves us, and our sins grieve the Holy Spirit, disciplines us to help us get back on track.

**2) Never take God for granted.** For a believer, we are secure in our relationship with Him. But at times I can take for granted Who God is and what He has done for us. I go through the motions. In **vs. 4** Paul speaks of some of the characteristics of God to remind us not to get too comfortable in our life. If we do not know Christ, Paul tells us about the God Who is willing to save us. If we are believers, he reminds us of the Who we serve and talks about some of God’s attributes and their application to us.

There is a warning at the beginning of **vs. 4**, the idea of thinking that we can pretty much live anyway we want without consequences because we are a Christian knowing we are forgiven and have eternal life secure **(see Rom. 6:1)**. A true follower desires, for the most part, to obey Christ.

Now, I am willing to guess that most of us here and watching online, if not all of us, do not **“presume”** when it comes to God’s character. The word **“presumes” means “to despise, think little or nothing of, to look down on.”** I do not believe that most of us despise God’s attributes or think little or nothing of them, or look down on them. If we do, we have a spiritual problem.

The word **“riches” in vs. 4 means “abundance, describing the excellence that abounds.”** God’s attributes, as we begin, are abundant, excellent beyond measure. The character traits we want to talk about in **vs. 4** are important to people without Jesus because it shows how God continues to try to touch their lives and bring them into His family. They are also important to us as well who are Christ followers.

**First, we have God’s “kindness.”** This refers to God’s goodness, His gentleness. Think about this. God is good. He can be trusted, He gives us life and so much to enjoy. In God’s kindness, He shows an intense interest in us. He cares about His creation, and we are His crowning work **(Eph. 2:10)**.

**Point:** God has provided for His followers what we need for satisfaction and contentment. **Jam. 1:17** tells us that God continually gives from above every good and perfect gift. James writes this immediately after talking about how we battle temptation. **Jam. 1:17** is a remedy to that. God gives us what we need. God’s kindness was shown in Christ coming to die for our sins and to rise again **(Titus 3:4-7)**.

**Point:** For us who are Christ followers, we are to show kindness, and to do good, to others **(Col. 3:12)**. We can only live this out because of God being in our lives and our motives of kindness will be pure.

**Second, we experience God’s “tolerance” with what is going on in our lives.** In **vs. 4** we see the word **“forbearance.”** The word can mean **“toleration, a holding back, delaying.”** We deserve to be judged but God, for those who do not have a relationship with Him, holds back judgment and is tolerant with those folks, wanting them to come to Him for salvation **(2 Peter 3:9)**.

God endures a lot from people. They misrepresent Him, who do not tell the truth about Him, who test Him and use His name in vain. He is tolerant but there will come a time when judgment happens, for sure after death. He wants people to come to faith in Him and because of that, He is tolerant of many things.

**Point:** What about us as believers. Well, we stumble and fumble often, more than we would like to. But God, though He corrects us as **Heb. 12** reminds us, also tolerates a lot of stuff from us. We are not judged or condemned by Him **(Rom. 8:1)**, but let’s be honest, out of His love for us He puts up with a lot. We do not have the freedom to sin **(Gal. 5:13)**, we have freedom to serve and love God and others.

**Third, we experience God’s “patience.”** The word for **“patience”** here is, when it comes to believers, a fruit of the Spirit, an evidence that God lives in us. It means to be **“long-suffering, slow in avenging wrongs.”** We see it also in **Col. 3:12** as something we as Christ followers are to practice.

When it applies to God, He is patient. When He is wronged, He does not immediately spring into action to attack us, to get at us. At times He does immediately intervene, but He is also patient, again, especially with people who need a relationship with Him.

When you think about it, if anyone would have the “right”, if we can use that word, to be impatient, it would be God. As we noted in talking about God’s tolerance, He is not always treated well, and in some cases, and sadly, even believers treat God with disrespect. But He is patient with us.

**Point:** For us who are Christians, we need to be thankful for God’s patience. When we slip-up, He convicts us of sin because He cares for us. And He is patient with us as we grow in our Christian life, and He never avenges Himself on us when we treat Him poorly.

The end of **vs. 4 and vs. 5** here in **Rom. 2** remind us of two things. For those who need Christ, God’s kindness is continually shown with the hope that we will repent if we need to be saved. In **vs. 5** Paul notes the actual state of the hearts of these people and that instead of turning to Christ, they are simply storing up judgment on themselves because they refuse to repent.

Self-righteous people have a hard time repenting. They have a hard time apologizing when it is pointed out that they wronged someone. Paul tells us in **vs. 5** that there are people whose spiritual hearts are **“hard” (obstinate, stubborn, perverseness)** and **“impenitent” (admitting no change of mind, unrepentant)**, and this leads to a refusal to turn from sin.

**Point:** For us as believers, we can become self-righteous, and in some cases excuse our sins. That is not a healthy road to go down for us who know the Lord. We need to realize how important it is for us to repent of sins when we do wrong, to be sensitive to when God is working in our lives, and to allow Him to do His molding of us into the image of Christ **(Rom. 8:29)**, and He does that in many ways.

**3) God always responds in the right way.** I think sometimes as Christians we short-change the awesomeness of God. I have done that. I take for granted all the things He has done in my life and in the life of my family. I take for granted the people He has allowed into my life who have been an influence.

Many gods of other religions are fickle. In the ancient world, the Roman gods were that way. You had to do something to appease them, to gain their favor, and they may or may not respond to you as you had hoped. In other religions god, as defined by that belief system, is sometimes kind, sometimes harsh.

The God of Christianity can be kind and just at the same time. Since He wants everyone to come to know Him as Lord and Savior, He is kind but because He is also holy and pure, He is just and righteous when He deals with sin, and does so in the right way.

I want to finish this morning and spend a few moments in **Rom. 2:6-10** and clarify some things and bring home to us some thoughts from a theological and practical point of view.

**I want to note what Paul is not saying.** He is not saying that salvation comes by what we do, that God looks at our works and then determines whether we have done enough, or that the good we did outweighs the bad, to get into heaven. It is clear that the Bible does not teach that.

But it does tell us in **Rev. 20:11-15** that at the Great White Throne Judgment people’s works will be noted. Their thoughts, words, and deeds, simply provide the evidence for eternal condemnation, that they do not know the Lord. Paul does contrast here in **Rom. 2** those who put their faith in Christ for salvation and those who count on themselves to gain eternal life.

**Vs. 6** may be a little puzzling but keep in mind that Paul is about to draw a comparison between those who know the Lord and those who do not but are self-righteous in their religion. That is why it is important to remember that God always responds in the right way.

**Vs. 6** may seem that it is teaching that we work our way to heaven. But as we see in the context of the passage that is not what he is saying. **Vs. 6** tells us that God will **“render” (recompense, give back, repay, reward)** in the future, each person according to their works. This is because their works, the things they do, show whether they belong to Christ or not. There is a standard by which God does this. That standard is Himself and His Word, the Bible. God will “measure” what our lives have shown.

**Vs. 7** again, if we do not understand the context, we might think this is talking about earning eternal life. What Paul does is contrast the person in **vs. 7** with the individuals in **vss. 8-10**. In **vs. 7** this person is one whose pursuit of God is genuine and is seen in their life.

The word for **“patience”** in **vs. 7** describes someone who, regardless of the trials and difficulties of their life, are loyal to their faith even the greatest trials. Without exception, this word speaks of believers only in the NT when used this way. It can refer to being patient as we wait for Christ to return but that is not the use here.

True believers will stumble, have doubts, wrestle with things, but we stay the course and when we fall, we get up and dust off. The idea of patience in **“well-doing”** means we do the right thing no matter the cost to us. We follow the Lord. We will do what is good, what is virtuous. It is evidence of our salvation.

We will do things to seek to bring glory to God. That is what **vs. 7** is saying. The word “honor” describes the honor of one who outranks others, pre-eminence. We will be rewarded in the future because of our relationship with God. It has the idea of value that is placed on something. Christ is to be honored above all. We will one day have an incorruptible, immortal body when we are in heaven with Jesus.

**Warren Wiersbe** states it well, **“True saving faith results in obedience and godly living, even though there may be occasional falls.”**

**Rom. 2:8** shows the flip side to how a person lives, as we compare it to vs. 7. Vs. 8 begins with a contrast. Note the **“but for those”** shows a strong contrast, a logical contrast between the people mentioned in **vs. 8** and those in **vs. 7**. **Vs. 7** shows the life and attitude of a Christ follower.

**Vss. 8-9** show the attitude and life of one who does not know Christ, including the self-righteous religious person who thinks that they will gain God’s favor by what they do.

**In vs. 8, Paul says first, that the folks who do not know God are “self-seeking.”** This is a word we have noted before in other messages. It describes a person who will do what is necessary to put themselves forward, above others. They will cause problems, and have no trouble doing whatever it takes to get what they want. It describes electioneering for an office, a politician. Self-seeking individuals are self-absorbed. They are often the center of their universe.

**Second, these individuals “do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness.”** This does not describe a believer. We may slip up and not always do and live as we should, because we do sin. But the person in **vs. 8** lives this way. Believers cannot do so. A reading of **1 John, James, Ephesians, Colossians, and Romans** shows that we have been changed and there is a pull to obey and follow God.

That is why we have the “Spirit-flesh” conflict. We, in our inner being, desire to obey God but the flesh fights against us. **Vs. 8**, where it speaks of not obeying the truth, in the Greek can mean **“to refuse belief and obedience, to refuse to list, yield to, comply with, obey.”** It is a conscious choice. This person will not conform their life to what God wants or expects. It is a choice to not follow what God knows is best, but to, instead, choose to live in unrighteousness. This describes people who do not know the Lord.

**Vss. 8-9** clearly do not speak of those who are Christ followers. But there is judgment on those who reject the truth of God and refuse to bend a knee to Him. The Jews were self-righteous but lost, and in many cases, pursuing sinful lives and the Greeks may have been religious but their lifestyles opposed God.

**Vs. 10** is not teaching a works salvation. The person who does good can only do so out of a changed life with God’s Holy Spirit living within. We receive glory, honor, and peace, whether Jew or not. God is impartial **(vs. 11)**.

Let us as we leave here remember that God is fair, and that His heart is for all to be saved and for His children to live in a way that honors the Lord.