

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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The Behavior of Others Does Not Excuse *Us*

by Dan Trygg

“Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things. ² You say, ‘We know that God’s judgment on those who do such things is in accordance with truth.’ ³ Do you imagine, whoever you are, that when you judge those who do such things, and yet do them yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? ⁴ Or do you despise the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not realize that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? ⁵ But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God ⁶ who will repay to each one according to their deeds.”

Romans 2:1-5

Last week, we saw how God’s wrath was set against those who *suppress the truth*. From the world around them, and from within themselves, they *know* that God exists, and that they are accountable to Him, ...but they do not want to honor Him. Instead, they *disregard* Him, and *choose to live life on their own terms*, focusing mostly upon fulfilling sensual pleasures. This led to increasing levels of sin and self-degradation, culminating in a mindset that not only approves of evil, but also recruits others to join them in their sin.

In the next portion of Romans, Paul confronts those who would be quick to judge these people, pointing out that those who judge are undoubtedly guilty of doing the same things. They also *suppress the truth*. They also do not live up to the knowledge which they possess. They also *disregard* God and *live for sensual pleasures*, at least in some fashion. The temptation is to compare ourselves to others, ... to point out the obvious sins of others..., so that we could feel better about ourselves. Paul is quick to point out that comparing ourselves to others does not in the least change anything for the better, as far as our own accountability to God is concerned. He does not grade on a curve. His standards are absolute, not wishy-washy. Jesus warned us not to judge others, because we will be measured by the same standard as we measure others by (Matt. 7:1-5). We may not be doing the exact same expression of sinful behavior that others are involved in, but we likely are doing the same kind of thing in some part of our lives. This is especially true if we consider the thought life. Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount repeatedly extends the moral teachings of the Law to what we think, not just what we do (Matt. 5:21-22,27-28,33-37,38-42,43-48). A person is defiled by what comes out from his or her heart (Matt. 15:16-20).

An obvious area of inconsistency would be what many of us watch on TV, movies, or videos. We may not be involved with physical immorality ourselves, but we watch immoral relationships on the tube, over and over again, without batting an eye. We may not have murdered anyone ourselves, but we choose to watch other people murder over and over again. Something in us feeds on what is conveyed to us on video media, ...and it isn’t the Holy Spirit. What we are watching does not edify us in our spirit. This kind of programming does not renew our minds to be like Jesus. It is designed to titillate and stir up our fleshly desires, and even trains us to accept what we watch as normal. Our entire culture has been lured into new levels of sexual indulgence, violence and general public coarseness that would have been unthinkable a generation ago. We know this, yet we choose to suppress that truth (we don’t want to hear it) in order to be entertained. Paul says that we are really no different than those who are more heavily involved in these behaviors. If we know the truth, and choose to disregard it in order to do what we want, ...if we choose to disregard God, and choose not to honor Him or give Him thanks (Rom. 1:21) and keep Him in our awareness (Rom. 1:28), then in our hearts we are guilty of the same kind of sin as those who are more visibly farther down the path of spiritual and moral decline. (By the way, if you want to know how to grow as a Christian and develop a deeper, more intimate walk with God, then do exactly the opposite of what the people in Romans 1 did. Keep God in your knowledge. Surround yourself with reminders to draw your attention back to Him [cf. Deut. 6:4-9]. Immediately and consistently give Him thanks for any blessing you receive, or any promise He has given. Choose to honor Him in what you do and think. If you do these things, your life will change.)

Paul ratchets up the level of confrontation, now: “...do you suppose... you will escape the judgment of God?” If we can see that God’s judgment is rightly upon those who do these gross behaviors in Romans 1, ...and we are doing the same things in our thought life, do we think that God will not address these attitudes and inconsistencies in our lives? Do we suppose that He will let us skate by, but that He will prosecute those around us? Do we disregard the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, which are meant to lead us to repentance? He has cut us a lot of slack. Other people were instantly killed by Him for disregarding and breaking His commandments, some even with good intentions (Lev. 10:1-7; II Sam. 6:1-11). God does not play with sin. Why do you think He will not hold you accountable? Why do you continue to disregard Him and His expectations of you?

God is giving you room to come to your senses and choose to follow Him, so that you can avoid His wrath and judgment. But we still stubbornly go on our own way, disregarding and disrespecting Him, not knowing that we are storing up a backlog of offenses which will result in horrible judgment, when He finally brings us to account.

There is a day of judgment coming (II Pet. 3:3-7; II Thess. 1:6-10; Heb. 9:27; Acts 17:30,31; Jn. 5:22,23,28,29; Matt. 25:31-46; II Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:11-15). Note that Paul quotes from Psalm 62:12 and Proverbs 24:12, saying that God “will repay to each one according to their deeds.” **God will judge us based upon what we have done, or not done. We will be paid in a way that corresponds to our choices and actions** (Matt. 16:27). If we did evil things, then a *just recompense* will be assigned to us (e.g., II Tim 4:14). If we did good acts, then a *corresponding reward* will be meted out to us (Rev. 22:12).

This is true for church people, as well. For example, while the word picture of I Corinthians 3:10-15 is primarily about Christian leaders in the context, I believe it has application to all of us. There, Paul describes how **we build upon the foundation of our spiritual lives (which is Christ) with a variety of ingredients.** Some of these are inferior and transitory (wood, hay and straw), while some are precious, beautiful and able to endure the fires of testing which will come upon us (gold, silver, precious stones). **If a person’s works are burnt up, he or she is left with nothing.** He or she may still enter heaven, but will have nothing to show for their lives here, **because they invested their time and energy into things that produced no eternal benefit.**

The others, however, whose work stood the test of the fire, will enter into heaven full of the blessings of lives lived for God. The impact of their choices was that they were obedient to God, and influenced many others, who will welcome them into their eternal home (Lk. 16:9). **They chose to invest themselves in redemptive relationships with others,** rather than creature comforts or flashy, materialistic things. They used their earthly wealth, time and energy for eternal purposes, investing in others as an investment for the Kingdom of God. **The fruit of those investments endures to eternity,** while those of this material world do not transfer past the grave.

Vss. 7-10 of Romans 2 are somewhat controversial. They seem to be describing a “works righteousness”. On closer examination, however, that is *not* what they are saying. They are, rather, describing an *orientation* or *focus*. On the one hand are *the ones seeking* glory, honor and immortality by perseveringly doing good. To them, God will repay eternal life. On the other hand, are *the ones* who, oriented out from self-seeking and stubborn-resistance to the truth, are *trusting* in unrighteousness. To these, God will repay wrath and fury. **The first group are seeking for something outside of themselves, ...reaching out to God in faith that He will reward those who respect Him and seek to do His will** (cf. Acts 10:34,35; Heb. 11:6). **The second group are not at all seeking to reach out to God. They seek only their own immediate pleasure.** They even stubbornly resist what they know is true (again, suppressing the truth in unrighteousness – Rom. 1:18). Accountability to God, or eternal life, are of no concern or interest to them.

The last part of vs. 10, “...to the Jew first and also to the Greek” and vs. 11, “For there is no partiality with God”, are Paul’s attempt to begin to tear down the attitude of religious superiority that the Jews often had. Remember, a contingent of Jews had started the church in Rome, and they undoubtedly still had a significant representation among the believers. Furthermore, wherever Paul had traveled during his missionary journeys, he had been forced to deal with Jewish arrogance (e.g., Acts 13:44-47; 17:5-9,13; 18:12-17). Paul himself was a Jew, and proud of his heritage, but he had come to see that **God’s plan for Israel was to use them to bring the Messiah into the world so that He could win people from every nation to Him, and make them all into one family in Christ.** God’s gracious favor toward Israel was for that purpose. **He is not a God who plays favorites.** He will not overlook what a person does, and give him or her a “free pass” just because he or she is Jewish (or Christian, for that matter). The word translated as “partiality” is one of the earliest words coined by the early church. It is a compound word, literally meaning a “receiver of face”. In other words, **God is not one to judge by appearances, or treat people differently based upon their outward appearance.** It does not matter what a person’s background, history, or pedigree may be. What He is concerned with is, “Are they living up to the understanding they have?”

Note that **Paul deals with religious snobbery.** It is not those who are *hearers* of the Law (the Jews, ...or in our day, church people) who will be counted righteous by God, but those who actually *do* what is righteous. It doesn’t matter if people have the Law, or not. **Having the Law (or the Bible) does not make you righteous, or more acceptable to God. What matters is whether you live out what you know to be true.**

Those who sin without ever knowing the teachings of God’s Law will be judged by their conscience. Their ignorance may even *excuse* some of their poor choices, simply because *they did not know any better* (Prov. 24:12). **On the other hand, those who sin while knowing what the Law says will be judged by the Law.** In either case, **God will judge the secrets of the heart.** Nothing will be hidden from His sight (Heb. 4:12,13). Even the things done in secret will be revealed (Lk. 12:1-5). **The issue is that we do not live up to the knowledge we have. We all suppress the truth, in that we disregard it for selfish reasons, at times.**