

Kindness Leads to Repentance

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Date: 15 September 2024

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today. A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community, and as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good, they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in His Word. We're continuing this morning in our series in the Book of Romans, and you'll remember that the Book of Romans is a letter written by the Apostle Paul in the 50s AD, and it is called Romans for a very simple reason, which is that it's written to the churches in the city of Rome. Romans is about the gospel. It's about the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection, and it's Paul's hope, as we saw back in verse 11 of chapter 1, that these churches would be established in the gospel. We're going to see many applications as we go throughout the book, and yet again and again, we're going to return to this special focus on the mission and the unity of the church. As I've told you many times now, we'll have many spokes that are going to go out and explore different topics, and we will always quickly return back to the hub of the gospel. And we're continuing the argument that I mentioned to you during our confession of faith that Paul is making through chapters 1 through 3, which is that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. I mention that because I think it's tempting sometimes when we come to church and we hear a passage preached to just think, man, here's a random passage with some random points. And so what I want you to see is actually, no, there's this larger argument, there's this consistency, there's this theme that shows out over and over. Paul is building this one idea from multiple angles. And so our angle this morning on that theme is that everyone, in fact, deserves God's wrath.

It's not just Jews, not just Gentiles. No, actually, everyone falls short. It's with that I invite you to turn with me to God's Word. We're in Romans chapter 2. You can turn in your Bible. You can turn on your phone. You can turn in your worship guide. No matter where you turn, remember Proverbs 30, verse 5 tells us, every word of God proves true. He's a shield to those who take refuge in Him.

And so that's why we read now Romans chapter 2, starting at verse 1. 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. Do you suppose, O man, you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume on the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

But because of your hard and impenitent heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's Word. Our Father in heaven, we do thank you again that you haven't left us to wander aimlessly. You haven't abandoned us to figure out things on our own. You haven't treated us as orphans in a merciless universe, but instead you do come and speak to us. You tell us things that are encouraging, and you tell us things that are challenging and hard. We thank you that you always tell us what is true. We ask that you would do that again this morning, that you would be at work in our hearts and our minds and our lives, that we would be able to hear clearly from you in your Word.

And most of all, we'd be able to see your Son. We'd see our Lord Jesus as more beautiful and glorious and gracious than ever before. And we ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

[4 : 35] I know that many of you in our congregation are readers. You love to read. You love to read on your own. You love to read to your kids. And I know that some of you love to read theology books. And one of the most important theological treatises of the church in the 21st century was released in September of 2020. Despite its significance, it's been a little bit of a sleeper.

It's a scandal, in fact, that you can't find it on Christian books. You can't find it in any Christian bookstore that I'm aware of. In fact, I'm not sure that many of my pastor friends even know about this book. And so, because of that, I've brought a copy with me this morning so that you can be aware of it. It's called Everyone Poops by Taro Gomi. It's a significant theological work in the last several years. I don't have time to read all of it to you. I will show you the first page, though. It tells us, an elephant makes a big poop. A mouse makes a tiny poop.

Why, though, is this such an important theological work? It is because it drives really clearly to the point of Romans chapters 1 through 3, which I've now mentioned a couple times this morning.

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And so, as we get to the beginning of chapter 2, Paul is really just saying this one thing to his readers. You think you don't poop?

You do. You think you don't fall into this category from chapter 1? You need to think again. You don't think you deserve God's wrath? Well, then I have some hard news for you.

[6 : 20] Why do we bring up, of course, if this is the point of chapters 1 through 3, why am I telling you about this work this week and not next week? And the reason is this, because of what happened the last two weeks. The last two weeks, Paul has been making this point in chapter 1 that the Gentiles, that those who are not Jews, have given up God, that they've exchanged the Creator for the creation, and they've done it in a number of ways. You'll remember last week, verses 28 through 32, Andy preached to us this great series, this list, this overwhelming list of all these different sins.

You may have noticed, as those sins are listed, Paul continually uses the word they. They do this. They do that. They are doing these terrible things. Two weeks ago, verses 24 through 27, we had not a long list. We focused on the sin of homosexuality. And what was the word there? It was them.

So they and them, they're the ones who are doing these things. And it's tempting then, and Paul knows this. In fact, he's setting us up for this moment in chapter 2. It's tempting to read chapter 1 and think, oh, yes, that's right, Paul. I agree with you. Those people out there are terrible.

They are bad. That's great. I'm so glad you're finally calling them out on everything they're doing. And you know what? I'm so glad that someone else is recognizing how terrible the world is.

Get them, Paul. Tell them. Make sure they know how bad the Gentiles are. But you know what, man? I'm so glad chapter 1 is not about me. I'm so glad that that is about Gentiles and it's not about Jews.

[8 : 07] Those Gentiles out there, yeah, Paul knows he's onto something. They are some dirty, nasty little sinners. And you notice how Paul ends chapter 1. He says, this is verse 32 of chapter 1, 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. And so the person reading chapter 1, as they get to the end, think, man, I'm in the right camp. I don't approve of people who practice those things. No, I condemn those things. I'm completely in the clear. I'm good. I'm so glad we made it to the end of chapter 1. What a relief that that chapter is not about me.

Paul's actually setting us up for this moment to get to chapter 2, verse 1, because he whips the rug out from under us. Told us, last verse of chapter 1, those who approve such things, those people are bad, okay? It's bad to approve of those bad practices. And then he tells us, you know, the other option is also bad. Verse 1, you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another, you condemn yourself. There's a catch 22. Did you catch it? If you approve of these evil things, you're bad. If you judge these evil things, you're condemned. There's actually no good option.

It's wrong to look at those who are doing evil things and say, man, I approve of that. And it's wrong to look at those who are doing evil things and to judge them. And Paul's setting up this tension for us to ask this question, how can that be? How can it be that I can't judge them and I can't approve of them? This seems completely unfair, right? What am I supposed to do? Why is it that I can't judge? Well, he goes on to tell us, verse 1, for in passing judgment on another, you condemn yourself because you, the judge, practice the very same things. And if you've tracked with chapter 1, your response might be this, no, I don't, Paul. I don't practice homosexuality. That's what you were talking about in verses 24 through 27. I'm not a gossip. I don't hate my parents. I don't do those things in verses 28 through 32. This is nonsense. How can Paul say, I do the very same things?

And Paul's not saying, hey, you do every single exact action that's been listed in 24 through 32. No, not necessarily. He's saying you have the same heart. Remember, all of those evil actions were downstream of the fundamental problem. The fundamental problem we saw in chapter 1 is that they exchanged the creator for the creation. And so, Paul's not saying, hey, you've done everything in this long list. He's saying this, you, Jews, who think you're so righteous, are exactly the same as the Gentiles in this sense. You also have exchanged the creator for the creation. You also have a heart of sin. And let me prove it to you. This is what verse 1 is saying. Let's judge you by your standard.

Okay, you're going to judge the people around you. Can you live up to that same judgment? Can you, Jew, live up to the standard you use to judge the Gentiles? Can you, Christian, live up to the standard that you use to judge non-Christians? I bring up Christians and non-Christians because this Jew-Gentile distinction does not have the same, it's not a live issue for us in 2024 in the same way that it was a live issue for the churches in Rome in the first century. The relevant distinction for us really is the religious people and the non-religious people. That's what Paul's trying to say here. Hey, you're religious. You know the right way to live. You have God's moral law, His ethical code. Can you live up to that as you use it to judge the world outside? Even that, though, may not help us feel kind of how offended we're supposed to be by chapter 2 here. And so I want to push this a step further. If you want to get at how scandalous what Paul's saying in chapter 2 is, you've got to pick a group, you've got to find a group that you really despise. You have to find a group that is those people out there who do all kinds of crazy things in comparison to me and here who are good and just and upright. And I'm going to suggest there are a few things in our culture right now that get at this issue as much as our politics.

[13 : 13] That political party, the political party that you don't belong to, that party out there, those people are the evil ones. It's gotten so bad, in fact, and you'll see this on the back of your worship guide.

There's this concept, if I can get there, concept called motive attribution asymmetry. And motive attribution asymmetry is a fancy way of saying everything I do is motivated by good. I'm purely benevolent. Everything those people I hate do is obviously motivated by wickedness. And so, like, I'm the good guy, they're the bad guy.

So much so, and this is, again, on the back of your worship guide, researchers found the average Republican and the average Democrat suffer from a level of motive attribution asymmetry comparable with that of Palestinians and Israelis. And so, I want you to think about that. This is what Paul's doing. He's listing in chapter one all the things that that other political party does, the one you don't like, and you're thinking, yeah, Paul, get them, tell them. We know. We've all known all along.

We know they're so bad. Chapter two, verse one, you're guilty of the same thing. That's the whiplash we're meant to experience here in this chapter. Paul is saying, okay, you hate that group out there. Let's judge you by that standard. You're upset that that other party you don't like doesn't care about human life. Okay? Let's judge you by your standard. How is your driving on the highway? Does it reflect a concern for human life? How are your words when you speak about other people? Is there a sense that you believe they have dignity, that they're made in the image of God? Let's say that other party that you hate, you think that party is super greedy.

They're just out for gain and money. Great. Let's judge you by your standard. Let's look at your bank account. Let's look at your credit card statements. Is there any greed? Can you live up to the standard that you use? Maybe you're angry at that other party and you say, that party that I hate, the evil party, they don't care about caring for our earth. They don't care about the creation.

[15 : 41] Okay, great. Let's judge you by your standard. How does your consumption impact the earth? Maybe you look at that other party and you say, man, that party, they are so confused about sexuality.

They are so off the rails. I can't believe they're promoting those things. Great. Let's judge you by your standard. How do you use your sexuality? Do you always use it to build up others and nurture them? Do you never use your sexuality to control or manipulate? Can you live up to the standard you use?

Maybe you think this, that party that I hate, the bad party, they don't care about the poor. Great. Let's judge you by your standard. How do you measure up? If we look at your hours and your time and your money, do you care about the poor? And Paul's point here is this, you can't. You can't live up to your own standard. And you might be thinking at this point, man, this is super unfair. You're drawing this false moral equivalence. Yeah, my party, you know, my party has some issues, right? They have some things going on that aren't perfect, but it's nothing like the bad party, right? How unfair of you to compare these things? Like they're not equal. They're not the same, right? No one is perfect.

And you know what? That might be true. It also completely misses Paul's point. Because Paul's point is this, both groups are under God's judgment. Both groups break God's law. You can argue all day, right? You can measure and order and say, man, that other group is so much worse. Paul said, you know what? That's kind of irrelevant.

You've fallen into this trap. You've said, hey, I can find someone else to compare myself to and feel better than them. Of course, I have the moral high ground. And Paul is saying, no, you're not comparing yourself to how better you are than another group. You're comparing yourself to God's holy standard.

[18 : 03] And when you measure up against the law of God, everyone falls short.

And so it's irrelevant, right? We don't need to order and measure who is worse. Again, this is why this is such an important theological work that I introduced to you earlier today. What does it say? An elephant makes a big poop. A mouse, a small poop. Yeah, you can measure who's worse or bad. What's the point at the end of the day? Everyone poops. That's Paul's point.

Look, don't get on your moral high ground. When you are compared to the righteous law of God and His holiness, he will say, can you stand up to your own standard? Can you live up to the rules that you have set for this world? The answer is no.

So the point is this. Paul is saying, everyone is a hypocrite. Everyone, in some way, has exchanged the creator for the creation.

Repentance is not just for those people out there. Repentance is for these people in here. Repentance is not just for the non-religious people who do all these terrible things.

[19 : 31] No, repentance is for the religious people who have the same rebellious heart. I've mentioned to you before the Russian author Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who wrote the Gulag Archipelago about his time in prison in the Soviet Union.

And I've given you an abbreviated quote before. The full quote this morning is on page 8 of your worship guide. He says this. Gradually, it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either, but right through every human heart and through all human hearts.

Therefore, you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges, for in passing judgment on another, you condemn yourself.

Oh, you think there's a group out there that's unrighteous and a group in here that's righteous? No. No, the line between good and evil goes right through every human heart and through all human hearts.

It goes to the hearts of the non-religious. It goes to the hearts of the religious. It goes to the hearts of the Jews. It goes to the hearts of the Gentiles.

[21 : 06] As Paul's point in verse 1, verses 2 and 3, he goes on essentially to draw the logical conclusion of that. Verse 1, you can't live up to your own standard.

Verses 2 and 3, if you can't live up to your own standard, of course you also are going to face God's judgment. Verse 2, we know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things.

So verse 1, you know you can't live up to your own standard. Verse 2, because you can't live up to your own standard, God's judgment is coming for you too. Verse 3, do you suppose, O man, you who judge those who practice such things, and yet do them yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God?

Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

And Paul here is answering another objection. Someone might hear the logic of verses 1, 2, and 3 and think, well, okay, I hear you, Paul, but my life is really blessed.

[22 : 13] Everything I've done has prospered. I don't see God's judgment anywhere. I don't see it in my life. I don't see it in my friends' lives. No, everything I'm doing seems to be working super well.

And so you, Paul, are saying, like, I'm falling under God's judgment, but look at all this blessing in my life. Obviously, I'm not under God's judgment, right? And Paul's saying, no, no, no, you've missed something here.

You haven't experienced God's judgment yet because of his patience and forbearance. God is actually holding back his judgment. He's giving you time to repent.

This is not proof of your goodness. It's proof of God's goodness. Don't think that because you haven't seen judgment yet, judgment is not coming.

In the Wikipedia entry, for everyone poops, we're told this.

[23 : 15] The book is intended to relieve shame and embarrassment around the act of defecating by explaining to children that it is a natural part of life. And here is where Paul's point is the exact opposite.

Paul is not trying to remove shame and embarrassment. No, Paul's actually trying to wake us up. Guess what? Everyone poops, and that's a really bad thing, right? God's judgment is actually coming on this world.

You might think that you've escaped it for a time. You will not escape it forever. You think you're okay. You're not. There is no place to escape.

Chapter 1, verse 32, those who approve the evil things, they're condemned. And chapter 2, verse 1, those who judge the evil things, they're also condemned. There is no place to escape.

To illustrate this point, one pastor tells the story of a farmer. This farmer was not a Christian. In fact, even more than just not being a Christian, he was very hostile to Christianity.

[24 : 20] And he owned a tract of land that was right next to a church building. And so every Sunday, while the folks in the church building were worshiping, he would get out on his tractor and he would work his land.

And it was his way of saying, like, hey, I'm going to do the exact opposite of what you religious people do. Turned out his farm was extremely successful. He had a great harvest, a great cop.

And so he writes this letter to the pastor and he says, Pastor, I've done the exact opposite of what God commanded. God tells me to be in church on Sunday morning. I've been plowing my fields on Sunday morning instead.

I've experienced tremendous blessing. Clearly, God doesn't exist. Pastor writes him a letter back that says one sentence.

God doesn't settle his accounts in October. Yeah, you might experience blessing now.

[25 : 19] Verse four, do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

Why did you experience blessing? Not because you're good, but because God is good. And so to pull it back to Paul's point here in these three chapters, he is telling us once again in a different way from a different angle, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Yeah, being a good person, not enough. Being a good person, not up to God's standards. Being a good person still falls short of your own judgment.

And so what do we do? Paul's telling us, look, everyone actually needs a righteousness that comes from somewhere else. No one's works are good enough to stand before God on the last day.

Everyone needs repentance. Everyone needs God's grace. Everyone needs what we've already talked about. Romans chapter one, the theme verse for the book of Romans.

[26 : 38] For in it, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith. As it is written, the righteous shall live by faith.

If there's a catch-22, if those who approve are condemned and those who judge are condemned, what's the solution? The solution is to find a righteousness from somewhere else.

And of course, we know where that righteousness comes from. The solution is to have the righteousness of another. A righteousness not from our approving or our condemning, a righteousness that comes from Jesus Christ, who lived the perfect life that we should have lived, who died the death that we deserved, so that he, in his punishment, makes it so that we can live.

That's the only way. There's no good group or bad group. There's all groups who stand before God, deserving judgment. And that's the good news of the gospel.

Good news is that the catch-22 has an answer. The good news is that there is a way. It is not our own works, our own actions. There's a way that recognizes, hey, actually, I can't live up.

[27 : 48] I can't live up to God's standards. I can't live up to my own standards. And Jesus takes the punishment for me. That's the good news. Romans chapter one, again.

I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. The story is told of the English writer G.K. Chesterton, who saw in a newspaper an essay prompt inviting folks to write in to answer this question.

The question was, what's wrong with the world? G.K. Chesterton wrote a very short letter in response. He said, dear sirs, regarding your article, what's wrong with the world?

I am. Yours truly, G.K. Chesterton. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we do thank you that we're not stuck or caught in a catch-22.

We thank you that you've provided a hope and a future for your son and our Savior, our Lord Jesus. We ask that you would show us the extent and the depth of our sin, not so that we would wallow in it, but that we would run to you in your glory and your grace and your mercy.

[29 : 07] That our hope and our only hope would be in your son and our Savior, our Lord Jesus. It's in his name that we ask all of these things. Amen. Amen.