

SOUND DOCTRINE FOR SPIRITUAL SUCCESS – Studies in Romans

Human Hypocrisy and the Judgment of God (Romans 2:1-11)

Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS . . .”

Romans chapter two serves a dual purpose in the doctrinal section of this epistle. It confronts both moralistic Gentiles and Law-abiding Jews, who would most likely distance themselves from the people described in Romans one. They would also be confident of their adequacy in facing God’s judgment on their own merits. Paul’s incisive denunciation of such misguided self-righteousness is designed to prepare this particular group for a reality check. Namely, that absolutely no one is capable of surviving the judgment of God on the basis of their own behavior. In penetrating such a delusional misconception, he sets the stage for the doctrine of justification by faith, beginning in Romans 3:9.

For Paul, the human race consists of two groups of people, Jews and Gentiles. He addresses both in Romans 2:1-11, in order to clarify any confusion which might exist in either group, regarding the impartial character of God. In vv6, he quotes from Psalm 62:12, in order to affirm the overriding principle which governs God’s moral universe: “you will reap what you sow.” He uses vv1-5 to remind us that it is impossible to permanently avoid the consequences of the reap/sow dynamic. On the other hand, in vv7-11, he introduces an interesting hypothetical. If anyone, whether Jew or Gentile, was actually capable of a lifestyle which could survive the impartial scrutiny of God’s judgment, God would reward that individual with the blessing of eternal life (vv7, 10). Anyone failing that evaluation would become a recipient of God’s indignation and wrath (vv8-9). Paul’s purpose in presenting this scenario is not to create a false sense of hope; encouraging the pursuit of a self-righteous lifestyle, but to confirm that God is indeed an impartial judge. This in turn sets the stage for revealing in Romans 3, the impossibility of a positive outcome for such a supposition, since we are all sinners who fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

As is often the case, when we share our Christian faith with others, the people we encounter believe that God will accept them on the basis of how well they have behaved during the course of their earthly lives. They create this illusion of their own goodness by comparing themselves to others in a manner that is anything but impartial. In order to reach such a person on a human level with our witness, we must confront them with the righteous standard of God by which He will evaluate and judge every one of us: SINLESS PERFECTION.

Simply put, if an individual does not think they are a sinner, why would they believe in their need of a Savior? Convincing someone that the greatest need of their life is to be forgiven of their sin is essential in reaching them with the gospel.