

Hiding Behind Your Halo

The Perfect Judge Part I

Romans 2:1-3

Introduction

It gives me great pleasure to invite you to take your Bibles and turn with me to that inspired letter, written by Paul, to the believers in Rome. Turn to the book of Romans, chapter 2.

There is no doubt that first impressions can last a long time. Whether you are interviewing for a job, showing up for a class, or moving into the neighborhood, first impressions are hard to live down.

I remember reading about a new Holiday Inn that was interviewing for its entire staff – from custodians to clerks to maids. Those doing the interviews were given a very unusual instruction by their headquarters. Any prospective employee who smiled less than four times during the interview was to be automatically eliminated from consideration. I thought that was intriguing. If a person did not smile at least four times during that twenty minute interview, they were not asked to come back.

Wouldn't it be great to do that in the church? Why not? If it is good enough for Holiday Inn, it is good enough for the church. Any guy who comes to church and smiles less than four times gets a note in the mail, "Find another church – grouch." It might just solve our space problems!

Sociologists have studied the subject of first impressions. One study concluded that a first impression is solidified in the first four minutes of a conversation. They say that, if your first four minutes are positive, the person you are talking with will most likely view positively everything about you that they do not know anything about. Such things as

your professional skills, your morals, and even your intelligence. Why? Because you made a good first impression.

Sociologists call this the "halo effect". In other words, if you can put your best foot forward and come out looking and sounding impressive, you will create a "halo effect" about you that will last a long time.

The trouble is, this plays into our culture, where reputation carries more weight than character; where image is more important than substance. We live in a world that is consumed with creating halos and shining them at every opportunity!

It is true in the church as well. In fact, during the days of the apostle Paul, the Pharisees were professionals at polishing their halos. They made sure that they arrived at a street corner in the market place right at nine a.m., noon, and three p.m. when the dedicated Jew would stop everything and pray. The Bible says, in Matthew, chapter 6, that somehow, they always managed to be on a street corner at just those times where they could be viewed from all four directions.

The very first church in Jerusalem, as we are told in Acts, chapter 5, had a couple who were so passionate about making a good impression that they attempted to deceive the church. They brought a large gift of money and claimed it was the sale amount of some land they owned, when it was only a portion of the sale. Peter said to both of them, although they arrived a few minutes apart, "... why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit . . .?"

Both of them fell down and died on the spot.

Halos and hypocrisy have a lot more in common than the fact that they both start with the letter “H”. They both have to do with making a good impression.

And, so far, throughout the first chapter of Romans, halos have never been brighter. All the while Paul has been exposing the pagan world and their sins, their perversion, their hatred for God and their love of evil, all the good and upstanding people were saying, “Amen, Paul! Go get ‘em. It’s about time someone gave those pagans a thing or two.”

Some Key Words

Suddenly, however, with the stroke of an inspired pen, Paul changes his focus.

Shift in focus from “they” to “you”

If you look back at chapter 1 and pay attention to the pronouns, you will notice the shift that takes place in chapter 2.

For instance, in chapter 1:

- verse 20, “. . . His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.”
- verse 22, “Professing to be wise, they became fools”
- verse 24, “Therefore God gave them over . . .”
- verse 25, “For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie . . .”
- verse 28, “And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over . . .”

“They,” those other sinners, it is all about “them”!

And the reader is saying in his heart, “You’re absolutely right, Paul. Those people are without excuse. They deserve all the judgment they can get!”

Then, suddenly, in the first verse of chapter 2, Paul changes the pronoun from “them” and begins to write about us.

Therefore, you are without excuse . . .

Typically the word “therefore” is used by Paul to begin a conclusion based upon the preceding verses.

In this instance, “therefore” does not look backward, but forward with anticipation. You could

translate it, “For the following reasons, you are without excuse.”¹

Second appearance of the phrase “without excuse”

You must understand that Paul has changed his audience:

- In chapter 1, Paul has declared the immoral man to be without excuse.
- In chapter 3, Paul will declare the religious man to be without excuse.
- In chapter 2, Paul declares the moral man to be without excuse.

The moral man includes the upstanding member of the community, the provider, the person with a good reputation, the person who has never been seen in jail but has probably been seen in church. Paul is writing to all the people with halos.

He is writing to the people who have read chapter 1, about the perversions of the immoral man and the degradation of depraved society, and said to themselves, “I may not be perfect, but I’m not that bad. These people, in chapter 1, need saving, but not me. I’m a pretty good person. Surely God appreciates the fact that I live by the golden rule. And I’m sure He notices that I’m in church too.”

Six appearances of the word “krino/krima” (judge/judgment)

Paul says, “Oh no, you’re as guilty before the perfect Judge as all the people, in chapter 1, who are guilty of greed, evil, deceit, malice, arrogance, murder, and the inventions of evil.”

How can that be?

Let us continue reading Romans, chapter 2, verse 1.

Therefore you are without excuse, every man of you who passes judgment, for in that you judge another, you condemn yourself . . .

An Important Clarification

Now, I need to pause to make an important clarification.

There are many, today, in the community and in the church, who misunderstand what Paul is saying by simply putting a period where a period does not belong. They go to verse 1 and read it this way,

Therefore you are without excuse, every man of you who passes judgment, for in that you judge another, you condemn yourself

– period. But there is not a period there.

What God is condemning is the fact that a person is judging others for committing sins that they themselves are in the process of practicing. Verse 1 continues to say,

. . . for you who judge practice the same things.

But our society, at large, has stopped judging anything as right or wrong, and the church has followed suit. They would say, “No, no, you shouldn’t judge that person.”

The church, today, has confused gossip with godly judgment. And should you dare to judge someone as wrong, you will most likely hear, “Ah, ah, ah, don’t judge, lest you be judged.”

When Is It Right To Judge?

Would it surprise you to discover that the Bible actually tells the believer there are certain times and situations when they must judge and pass judgment? Let me give you several situations when it is absolutely right and necessary to judge. It is so important in order to correctly interpret Romans, chapter 2, verse 1.

When you judge . . .

1. It is right to judge when you judge yourself as it relates to personal holiness.

I Corinthians, chapter 11, verses 28 through 31, introduce the repentant and godly attitude of a person about to partake in communion.

But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. But if we judged ourselves rightly, we should not be judged.

You get the idea that communion is a time of personal judgment; a time of evaluation and confession of sin. We are to evaluate our walk with the Lord.

Frankly, there is far too little evaluation going on in our own lives. We do not like it because it

requires humility and confession. But, we are to judge ourselves.

When you judge . . .

2. Secondly, it is right to judge when you judge sinning believers as it relates to their repentance.

The church in Corinth had, among its membership, a man guilty of immorality. He was sexually involved with his stepmother, and refused to repent of it. The church had taken a position much like the church today – arrogant of their tolerance of sin and so-called sophistication. They refused to deal with the man and remove him from their fellowship in an act of discipline and godly judgment. Paul wrote to them in I Corinthians, chapter 5, verses 2 through 3, and said,

And you have become arrogant, and have not mourned instead, in order that the one who had done this deed might be removed from your midst. For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present.

Skip to verses 9 through 11 and continue,

I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world . . . But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler – not even to eat with such a one. [So] . . . Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.

It is a painful experience to remove a disobedient, unrepentant member of the body and then, withhold fellowship from that person. Paul says, in these verses, not to even eat a meal with them.

Why go to such painful lengths? We, the church, are to let them feel the effects of the loss of fellowship – to cause them, if they are indeed true believers, to yearn for intimacy with Christ and the church once again.

The truth is, we do not help people by ignoring, or justifying, or accepting their sin, we hurt them. And, we hurt the cause of Christ and the honor of His holy name.

When you judge . . .

3. Thirdly, it is right to judge when you judge teachers as it relates to doctrine.

Look at Romans, chapter 16, verse 17.

Now I urge you brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching . . .

(the doctrine)

. . . which you learned, turn away from them.

The apostle John adds his own warning, in II John, chapter 1, verses 10 and 11,

If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.

Obviously, a greeting in this culture, referred to hospitality, such as feeding, clothing, and housing. I wonder how popular John would be today, for identifying a false preacher or priest saying, “That man is teaching error, stay away from him. Don’t even greet him and, whatever you do, don’t feed him!”

When you judge . . .

4. The fourth occasion when it is right to judge is when you judge everything as it relates to scripture.

In I Corinthians, chapter 2, verse 15, Paul wrote,

. . . he who is spiritual . . .

Do you want to be spiritual? Then listen,

. . . he who is spiritual [judges] all things . . .

That covers it all.

The Christian community, today, would say, “That person who is spiritual never judges anything or anybody.”

Paul says, a person who is spiritual thinks critically, appraises right from wrong, and passes judgment on people, things, activities, trends, and fads, and says, “That is wrong and that is right.”

You say, “But that might not make a good impression out there . . . that might tarnish our halo!”

Ladies and gentlemen, the church, today, might have a halo, but it does not have a spine.

According to the Word of God, for those with enough spiritual backbone, it is right to judge:

- yourself, as it relates to personal holiness,

- a sinning believer, as it relates to their repentance,
- a teacher, as it relates to doctrine, and
- everything, in light of what scripture says is right and wrong, evil and holy, unnecessary and excellent.

When Is It Wrong To Judge?

Well, the question might be asked, “Just when is it wrong to judge?”

When you do not know . . .

1. It is wrong to judge when you do not know all of the facts.

That more than likely means you are not part of the problem or part of the solution. That is when judging gives way to gossiping.

In John, chapter 7, verse 51, Jesus Christ validated the Law, which states,

[It] does not judge a man, unless it first hears from him and knows what he is doing .

..

When you pass judgment on someone’s . . .

2. Furthermore, it is wrong to judge when you pass judgment on what you think a person’s motive is.

In I Corinthians, chapter 4, verse 5, Paul said that there are some issues where we will simply have to wait until the Lord comes.

. . . who will . . . bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men’s hearts . . .

When it is an attempt to . . .

3. Finally, it is wrong to judge when it is merely an attempt to look better than the person you are judging.

In Matthew, chapter 7, verse 1, our Lord said,

Do not judge lest you be judged.

Most people stop there and say, “See – don’t judge anything or anybody.”

Well, we have already seen passages where we are actually told to judge others. What did the Lord mean here? All you have to do is keep reading. Continue to Matthew, chapter 7, verses 2 through 3,

For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?

The Lord pulls an illustration out of His construction background – He used to be a carpenter. The Greek word for “speck” is “karpchos,” which means, “splinter of wood”. The word for “log” is the word used in reference to a support beam of wood or a rafter for a house. Notice that a splinter and a rafter are made of the same material – they are just different sizes.

Both of these men have the same problem – one is just deeper in the sin than the other. The one with the rafter sticking out of his eye runs over and says, “Hey, you’ve got a splinter in your eye. I need to get it out.”

Of course, he knocks the guy off his feet with that beam of wood.

The Lord goes on to say these interesting words, that are usually overlooked, in verse 5,

You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the splinter out of your brother's eye.

He does not say, “Get the log out of your eye and then ignore your brother’s splinter.”

No. He says, “Confess your own sin and clean up your own life and then, with clear spiritual vision, help your brother clean up his.”

We are not, however, to attempt to make our huge plank seem smaller by pointing out the problems of others.

A Revealing Issue

I think this entire issue of judging others, for the wrong reasons and in the wrong way, is a rather revealing issue.

What Judging Others Wrongly Reveals About Us

There are at least four revelations about our nature and character that emerge from our attitude toward others.

There is a natural tendency to condemn sin in others and . . .

1. First, there is a natural tendency to condemn sin in others and minimize that same sin in our own lives.

You say:

- “That man has a terrible temper” – but your mother is Irish; that is the way you were born,
- “That person is so stubborn” – but you just have strong convictions,
- “I’ve seen that person steal things from work” – but you just sort of absentmindedly borrow things,
- “That person is defensive” – but you are just sensitive to stand up for what is right,
- “That guy’s a liar, you can’t trust what he says” – but you just stretch the truth a little, here and there.

We tend to exaggerate the faults of others and minimize our own. It is an issue of pride. How wise is the person who has a small view of themselves and is satisfied!

I love the story of Winston Churchill, who was sitting on a platform waiting to speak to a huge crowd gathered to hear him. The chairman of the event leaned over and said, “You must be so proud, Mr. Churchill, that all these people came just to hear you speak.”

Churchill responded, “Whenever I am tempted to be so excited about something like that, I always try to remember that, if instead of giving a political speech I was being hanged by the neck, the crowd would be twice as big.”

We are remarkably discerning about the sins of others and . . .

2. The second revelation of ourselves in judging others for the wrong reasons is that we are remarkably discerning about the sins of others and remarkably dense about our own.

David is the classic example. We are given the story in II Samuel, chapters 11 and 12. He committed adultery with Bathsheba and then, under his direct orders to General Joab, he had her husband placed on the front line of battle and then, abandoned so he would be killed. David then married Bathsheba and life went on as usual.

God, however, sent Nathan to confront David. Nathan did so by telling David a story about a poor shepherd. The shepherd’s only lamb had been taken, killed, and eaten by a wealthy man who was entertaining guests and did not want to kill one of his

own lambs for the feast. David said, “What?! We’ve got a sheep stealer in the kingdom? Put him to death.”

Nathan said, in effect, “We’ve got a wife stealer in the kingdom too. It’s the same problem. The only difference is the magnitude of the stolen object. You, David, are the greater thief. If that wealthy man should die for stealing a lamb, what should happen to you?”

We have an intuitive knowledge of a perfect standard . . .

3. Thirdly, we have an intuitive knowledge of a perfect standard for right and wrong.

Notice what Paul said in Romans, chapter 2, verse 2.

And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things.

“And we know . . .” – he uses the same thought in chapter 1, verse 21.

. . . even though they knew [about] God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks . . .

Also, in chapter 1, verse 32.

And, although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

Now, in chapter 2, Paul speaks of the moral man having an intuitive knowledge of right and wrong and the rightness of judgment upon that which is wrong. A rapist, or child molester, or murderer will get killed in a prison riot, and the moral man will say, “He got what he deserved.”

We condemn ourselves by applying a holy standard to other people . . .

4. The fourth and final revelation is that we condemn ourselves by applying a holy standard to other people, but do not keep the same standard for ourselves.

Look at Romans, chapter 2, verse 3.

And do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment upon those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God?

Listen carefully. Here is Paul’s primary point!

He says to his reader, “Mr. Moral Man, you have put yourself in the place of a judge – condemning the sins of others. Have you forgotten that, by applying the law to that other person, a law you instinctively know is true, you are now responsible to keep that same law? You have created and imposed a standard on others. Have you forgotten that you, yourself, will one day stand before the standard of the perfect Judge?”

The moral man counters and says, “Yea, that may be true, but I’ve passed judgment on the murderer, the adulterer, the blasphemer, and the thief. I’ve never done those things!”

Oh?

Jesus Christ, the perfect Judge, said, in Matthew, chapter 5, verses 21 and 22, paraphrased, “Your rabbis taught you not to kill. But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause will be judged.”

No, you have not picked up the sword, but in your heart, you have wished them dead. God said, that is as good as murder.

Jesus Christ also said, in Matthew, chapter 5, verses 27 and 28, paraphrased, “You’ve heard it taught that you shouldn’t commit adultery. But I say to you that whoever looks on a woman with lust commits adultery with her in his heart.”

Have you ever withheld your will from God and refused to obey Him? Then you are a thief, because your life belongs to Him.

We could work our way through the entire Ten Commandments and discover that we are guilty of them all.

Look at Romans, chapter 2, verse 3, again. Paul writes,

And do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment upon those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God?

The great preacher, Donald Grey Barnhouse, preached to his large, downtown, Philadelphia Presbyterian congregation fifty years ago, and he paraphrased this verse to read,

And do you suppose this, you dummy, . . .

(which must have shocked his audience awake)

. . . do you really figure that you have an angle that will let you go up against God and get away with it? You don’t have a ghost of a chance. There is no escape. Do you understand? No escape – ever. And this

*means you – the respectable person, sitting in judgment upon another person and remaining unrepentant yourself.*²

A Serious Warning God: The Perfect Judge

Paul ends verse 3 with a serious warning. It is a warning that is echoed in the book of Hebrews, chapter 9, verse 27, that says,

. . . it is appointed for man to die once and after this comes judgment

There will be no hiding behind halos then. There will be no need for good impressions. The first four minutes standing before God will not make any difference.

It is possible, one commentator illustrated, for a criminal to get away with his crime in several different ways:

- his crime can go undetected (like the man on a news documentary, recently, who killed a woman and put her body in a steel barrel for thirty two years, and no one ever looked inside),
- if he is arrested, his lawyer might find a loophole that will let him go,
- he can flee to another country and not pay the penalty,
- if he is found guilty and put into prison, he can escape and live life on the run.³

Paul says, in verse 3, “Do you think that you will escape the judgment of God?!”

You cannot escape:

Because God is omniscient, no sin will go . . .

- because God is omniscient; that is, He knows everything. No sin will go undetected. He knows every deed you have ever done. In fact, in Romans, chapter 2, verse 16, Paul writes,

. . . God will judge the secrets of men

...

Because God is omnipresent, no sin can be . . .

- because God is omnipresent; that is, He is everywhere. No sin can be denied. He was there when you stole. He was there when you committed adultery. He watched you steal. He heard you lie and deceive. He saw hatred in your heart. He knew the pride in your actions. He saw lust. He was there when you cheated. Ladies and gentlemen, He is not only the Judge and Jury, God is the eyewitness. He saw it all.

Because God is omnipotent, no one can . . .

- because God is omnipotent; that is, He is all powerful. No one is smart enough, strong enough, or clever enough to escape His prison house of punishment, called hell.

There is no escape. The moral man is without excuse – guilty of sin and in danger of coming judgment.

There is only one hope, before the day of judgment arrives, before the passing of that awful sentence by that perfect Judge – settle out of court.

Settle out of court! Meet the Judge before your court date comes – for then, it will be too late. Fall upon the mercy of the Judge and claim the payment of His Son’s death for your sin as your only escape.⁴

For . . .

As Romans, chapter 6, verse 23, tells us,

. . . the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

¹ Donald Grey Barnhouse, Romans (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), p. 2.

² Ibid., pp. 18, 22.

³ Ibid., p.18.

⁴ Ibid., p22.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 8/19/2001 by Stephen Davey.

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