Challenging Our Natural Judgmentalism  
Romans 2:1-16

*You Christians are so judgmental.* It is something I have heard at various times over my almost 5 decades of being a Christian. As with most generalized statements, it is important to test that statement for its truth without defensiveness or emotion. Through the years I have found the statement sometimes is meritless, sometimes appears that way but isn’t and sometimes it is very real.

*For example,* in our day today, it is easy to come across judgmental when our motivation is anything because each is coming from a very different perspective. Take Jim and Jane. They had a rough first year of marriage, but then they gave themselves and their marriage to the Lord Jesus Christ. They changed, their marriage changed, they learned lots about God & His plans in the Bible through their new church. BUT they had never been able to share any of this with Jane’s family because they felt inadequate and feared they would fail. Now 4 years later, they were determined to change that. So as they headed to Christmas at Jane’s family, they prayed and tried to figure out how to start a spiritual conversation without turning the family off. Well, it was now later on Christmas day when everyone is relaxed and just kind of laying around. Jim and Jane asked Jane’s younger sister Katie how her life was going. Katie got all excited and told them she was on a spiritual high. An angel had appeared to her in a dream. Before Katie could say another word or even say what the angel said, Jane jumped in to passionately tell Katie that the Bible says satan masquerades as an angel of light – she didn’t know what she was messing around with. Jim then jumped in and said she was following New Age belief that was close to witchcraft. When Jim & Jane finished, there was an award silence before Katie walked out, never to speak to them again that weekend. She told the rest of the family she had been disrespected, parented, judged and essentially called a witch. No one wanted to talk about spiritual issues with them. Jim & Jane were crushed and decided to not talk about their faith again. Meanwhile the family came to a different conclusion that the only way to have a safe conversation with any Christian is to only bring up what you already knew they agreed with. Now this is not the “judgmentalism” our passage is dealing with today. In fact, if you have unknowingly done this to others in the past, it’s not the end, God is not mad at you and you don’t have to become silent and hide away. Learning to be a safe place for people to share their thoughts without you feeling you must always & immediately straighten others out, is a wonderful skill to learn for the advancement of Jesus’ message in a post-truth, post-Christian culture. Today we want to go deeper than that – to the real judgmentalism that is naturally apart of our old nature.

For the first two weeks of our current teaching series on Romans 1-3 we focused on the gospel – the good news that Jesus offers to every human. Through Jesus’ death on the cross to pay the penalty of our sins and clear confirmation through His bodily resurrection from the dead, Jesus offers to us forgiveness, a restored personal relationship with God, the Holy Spirit inside us, heaven, and so much more. While we can never be righteous enough to earn or qualify for heaven, the Lord offers His righteousness to all who will believe in Jesus through faith.
two weeks we have looked at sin, wickedness, suppression of God’s truth, lack of thanks or appreciation, and the unwillingness to follow God’s ways which is happening around us. The words we read in Romans 1:18-32 are strong. At this point if one has any kind of belief in God or any moral sensitivity, it is easy to think, "Well I am glad that is not me. Those people are really awful. I am glad I am not like that." We naturally judge ourselves against others.

PROPOSITION: God’s good news isn’t going to be “good news” for us if we don’t rightly see our own sin. God actually seeks to bring us to repentance through kindness before harder measures!

I. Judgmentalism comes naturally the more we know

A. We often do a similar thing to what we judge others for

READ v 1-3. There were two different groups God is speaking to here. The primary ones are those who believe in God, especially the true God – back then it was the Jews. The second are those who hold to high ethical standards and seek to live moral lives. Both of these groups would condemn the widespread moral corruption of the day and both have sacrificed to live differently. So people in both of these situations can conclude that the message in Romans 1:18-32 does NOT apply to them because they either believe in God or they are living a different lifestyle than what was described. While we may occasionally lie, we aren’t filled with lies. Yet God challenges us that these words DO apply to us, READ v 1. Those who know God or try for moral living have NO excuse, just like those who ignore God’s revelation of His power and deity in creation around us have no excuse. So how can God say this, since there is a clear difference between church-goers and God-haters; between murderers and those who try to help others? What does it mean that those who pass judgment on others do the same thing?

We don’t understand this because (1) we do not understand the greatness & perfection of God’s holiness and (2) because we do not understand the depth of our own sin. It is not that people won’t admit that they are sinners, but we won’t admit to the terribleness of our own actions. We are quick to admit “no one is perfect” or “to err is human” but we view our shortfalls as little sins. We have no trouble saying those who do “the big sins” like murder or rape or child abuse deserve punishment. But it doesn’t seem right to us that having an envious thought, lying one time, or being arrogant after a victory should even attract the attention of a holy, righteous and just God. It is like we are saying to God, “But everyone does that!” We believe our own actions should be overlooked as long as we don’t do it as often, or as strongly, or in the same ways others do it.

B. Jesus’ warning (Matthew 7:2)

In Matthew 7:1-2, Jesus gives us the criteria God wants us to apply to ourselves: “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” The
measure we use on coming to our conclusions of others, will be applied to us. That does not bode well for our current American culture because we have this tendency to judge others on their actions while judging ourselves on our intent. When a car cuts us off, we complain about them being selfish, putting others in danger or not being concerned about others. But when someone beeps their horn at our action, we get frustrated – “Give me a break – I’m just trying to help someone or momentarily lost my concentration or the sun was in my eyes.” Because we didn’t mean any harm or were doing something important we should be forgiven, not judged! God is not deceived by our renaming of our personal sins. Others lie and cheat—we simply embellish. Others betray—we protect our rights. Others steal—we borrow. Others are prejudiced—we have convictions. Keep track for a week of the actual actions others do that gets you upset. Then check objectively over the next month if you do any of those actions. No excuses, no looking at intent, no rationalizing. It can be quite sobering, because there is this natural tendency in us to genuinely judge others.

C. God first tries to get us to repentance through grace & mercy

Now when God challenges us in the area of sin, it is for our own benefit. READ v 4. Talk about shaking up our thinking. We are focused on the bad consequences of sin and the Lord says we have missed His initial and preferred way to bring us to that point of repentance is actually kindness – “His acts of kindness towards us”? While we wrongly conclude that anything that goes wrong in our life now must be God being angry at us for sins done years or decades before, we miss the incredible love of our Heavenly Father which seeks to first wake us up to error through undeserved kindness. Because we all fall short of God’s perfect standard, we can’t experience freedom, healing and transformation without getting to the point of real repentance. And on page 3 I have given you some objective indications of real repentance. The moralizer, whether religious or secular, comes to believe that God’s “kindness, tolerance and patience” in their life is actually some kind of divine or cosmic OK for ALL of what they do.

Does God really try to reach through to our stubbornness, sinfulness and selfishness first through kindness (or goodness as some other versions translate it)? In her memoir about the journey from being a committed lesbian opposed to the Bible to being a committed Christian, Rosaria Butterfield says it was a kind action that opened the door. As a non-Christian, she viewed Bible-believing Christians as poor thinkers, judgmental, scornful, and afraid of diversity. She published a scathing critique of an evangelical Christian group in her local newspaper. A lot of very passionate responses came in, so she put two boxes on opposite sides of her desk – one for hate mail and one for fan mail. But there was one letter that came in from a local pastor that she couldn’t figure out what to do with. It was kind but also had probing questions. She said, “It was the kindest letter of opposition that I had ever received.” For seven days she left it out between the two boxes and eventually contacted that pastor and his wife. “They talked with me in a way that didn’t make me feel erased.” Their friendship was an important part of her journey to faith.
God is kind, true, and patient. Do we believe that? Anytime that God has had to get tougher with you or me — and He loves us too much not to — if we open our eyes we’ll probably some great good or kindness He has shown us in the past that we didn’t deserve. It is why so many of you tell me things like, “Long before I repented and committed my life to Jesus, I sensed God protecting me or providing for me or guiding me.”

A. Judgement reveals stubbornness and unrepentance

So why do we miss God’s kind actions leading us to repentance? Because our problem is not a lack of knowledge, it is much deeper than that. READ v 5-6. First off, we miss God’s kindness because of our stubbornness — we want to do what we want, when we want and how we want rather than what God wants us to do. We get hardened. In fact this is where we get our English word scler-o-sis (/sklo’rosis/), like Multiple Sclerosis or MS. Medically, sclerosis is the abnormal hardening of body tissue and MS is hardening in multiple areas — that is why it is called MS, multiple hardenings. Second, we miss God’s kindness because of our unrepentant heart. When we do recognize something we do wrong, we have no desire to change or live differently. Instead we try reframe the situation so it doesn’t look so bad - lots of excuses, appeals to intent followed by blame of others come to our minds.

B. What God wants us to persist at

C. What comes from self-seeking, reject truth and follow evil

What does God want us to persist at? READ v 7. Persist at doing good! Don’t become weary in doing good, Galatians 6:9 reminds us. Our helping others, improving society, caring for family, giving a good days work to our employer, serving Jesus, bringing God’s good news to others, these good actions are not to earn pay from God or to prove to God how good we are. Eternal life is not a reward for good living, it is a gift of God given to those who fall short, but genuinely repent of those areas and keep attempting to go a different direction even though we probably will fall short. What’s the difference between persisting in doing good as God wants us to and doing good to try to earn our standing with God? It may be hard to have words for but I think there is a common situation where we have experienced it.

Let’s say you have gone on a diet or intentionally marked time in your daily planner for a quiet time with God or removed some of the sweets & junk food from your home. You did that because you wanted to do good in this case for your body or spirit. That’s good. As you continue that, you also find extra positives coming into your life because of your success in that area. That gives you even more motivation to persist in this good habit. But then weeks later, stress comes in, tiredness over takes you, or frustration overwhelms you and you totally blow it — not only don’t you do what you want to do, but you do the total opposite. What happens to us the next day, the day after that and the day after that? For many of us, we give up — “I can never do this, I can never succeed, why bother” and quickly go back to what we were doing before we started this good. That only makes sense if we put all our confidence in the end
result – and because we don’t see ourselves reaching that end result, no progress in between will be of any value. But if we are doing that good simply because it is the right thing to do in God’s eyes & He is encouraging us in it, then we’ll admit our weakness, ask for God’s help and put effort into the good the next day even though we have fallen short. In both cases we are doing good – God calls us to do good. In one case we think we can achieve this pinnacle which will transform so many other things in life. In the other case, we recognize we can’t be all we can be on our own, so we aren’t afraid to give the Lord our pathetically insignificant, but sacrificial on our part.

Notice in v 8 that the opposite of “doing good” is self-seeking, rejecting the truth and following evil. READ v 8. If self-seeking, rejecting the truth, and following evil are the opposite of ‘doing good’, then that means doing good also includes seeking God, accepting the truth of His revelation, and avoiding evil practices.

D. God offers glory, honor and peace

READ v 9-11. Somehow we instinctively know there should be negative consequences for doing wrong or evil. What God reminds is in v 9, is that no one gets a free pass from this whether Jew or Gentile – or in our day today whether someone is religious or non-religious. In judgment, God does not show favoritism. Equally true is what God offers us simply for putting our faith to work. READ v 10. God offers us “glory, honor and peace” for doing good. That sounds an awful lot like what we are to seek in in v 7, “glory, honor and immortality”. We will go through being shamed & attacked, we will go through loss and problems in this life, there will be relational conflict & heartache, things won’t go right or easy in this life, but there is a glory God wants to share with us in heaven. That eternal glory will out-weigh any suffering we go through. That glory brings us hope. That glory includes a powerful, perfect resurrection body that works in all ways. Do we want ease now or glory later?

III. God’s righteous judgment

Romans 2:12-16

The Day of Judgment is coming. It is wise for every person to “settle out of court” while we can. God has offered us a deal – one that we don’t deserve, nor could we ever earn. Our sins are put on Jesus on the cross and His righteousness is credited to us through faith, belief and surrender to Jesus! Or we can wrongly rely on how well we live our lives today in the final judgment. Now God is going to deal with people in accordance to what they have received. READ v 12-13. Notice that even those “obey the law” – that is seek to do what God wants them to do – don’t earn or merit righteousness, but “righteousness is credited to them”. This obedience isn’t perfection. We all need Jesus! We all need God’s forgiveness. We all need God’s unmerited mercy and grace. Praise the Lord there is a “deal” we can accept to settle “out of court” long before that final judgment day.

A. What about those who never knew the Bible

What about those who never knew the Bible or never heard about Jesus? Wouldn’t it be unfair for God to judge them for something they never had the opportunity to
know? Those who never heard of the Bible WHO SIN will perish, but the Law of Moses, or the Bible today, will not be used as the standard of judgment against them.

READ v 14-15. Not only has God revealed Himself in the Universe and nature around us as we saw a few weeks ago, but God has also revealed Himself through the moral laws He has put in the hearts of people. These moral laws are not ones that come naturally from a dog-eat-dog, “the survival of the fittest” environment and yet we find them in countless cultures throughout history & our world today. These moral laws reflect a moral law giver. While our hearts, conscience and thinking have been corrupted by the fall, they show a morality that is not found in nature. In fact if a human does not have a conscience; if they completely lack empathy & don’t care how someone else feels. We call them a sociopath. It never occurs to the sociopath that the person that they are deceiving or cheating, has their own rights, their own mind, and their own ability to make decisions for themselves. To the sociopath, what they need and want is most important of all. That is what succeeds in a survival of the fittest environment. Everyone has some knowledge of God clearly available to them through the starry heavens above and some knowledge of God through the moral law within.

B. What about those who were exposed to the Bible
What about those who are exposed to the Bible and the truth of Jesus. That is definitely an advantage which is why we want to bring the good news of Jesus to everyone to give them real hope. The Bible is the clearest revelation of God’s truth. But it also takes away our excuses. We have more detail, clarity and understanding, so more is required of us.

C. Be doers of the word, not just hearers (James 1:22-24)
The knowledge of the Bible and Jesus is of no advantage unless we act on it. READ v 13. Paul’s point here is that being a ‘hearer’ of the law does not guarantee righteousness in God’s sight. One must be a ‘doer’ of the law as well. Isn’t this what is said in James 1:22. “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.” One can stand, or pray or step forward to surrender their life to Jesus many times, but if there is no evidence of our repentance and faith in our actual actions, it is not Biblical faith. There is effort we Christians put into doing good, but it isn’t what makes us righteous or better than others.

D. Really good news comes through our recognizing our failures/secrets & seeing God’s grace
READ v 16. What will take place in the future is the judgment of God where “our secrets” – what we really did, said and thought as well as the real reasons we did these things – will be revealed by Jesus. Now Paul calls that a key part of the “good news” or gospel. How is it “good news” to have all our bad qualities revealed? Because we can’t be totally freed and totally transformed without that. Don’t be afraid to be profoundly honest before God, it unleashes more grace. We admit our past failures because we did do them, they did hurt others but God is transforming us through His grace. That doesn’t make us better than others. Except for the grace of
God – except for the kindness, goodness and protection of God, I could be tempted to carry out some equally major, visible wrong.

There is a natural judgmentalism that arises in us when we put more effort into doing good than those around us. Don’t let that trip you up! Don’t start seeing yourself as better than others or that God somehow “owes you”. That is why growth in godly humility is so empowering in the Christian life even as it is painful to our self-image. This strong focus on the nature of sin in Romans chapters 1-3 is for our good. Let’s open our eyes to the evidence that God actually uses kindness & patience to get us to see the error of our ways more or long before His wrath & righteous judgment. What God is going to bring out of this broken world and our broken lives is far greater than we could ever think or imagine!!!