

Please Read **Romans 2: 17 - 29**

This long passage holds the key to why Romans had to be written in the first place.

“But if you call yourself a Jew...” You see, as yet, the church was not Christian. The followers of “The Way,” (that is what disciples of Jesus were called), were still living out their lives and faith through the synagogues around the world. So when we hear of Paul and the other apostles going and starting churches, they were using the Jewish community to do so. They were not going into Damascus or Ephesus and erecting buildings that looked like the Methodist church down the street. Rather they were gathering men and women from the street corners and introducing them to Jesus in the Jewish synagogues.

But, and this is intriguing, Jesus outside the context of Judaism makes absolutely no sense. How would you explain to a non Jew the idea of Messiah, Son of God, Son of Man, Lamb of God, One Man’s Sin versus One Man’s Sacrifice? How could you explain the blood of the Lamb? How could you explain eternal life?

All of these concepts are from our Jewish heritage. Jesus, without Judaism, is gibberish. So all the church was Jewish. And then Paul was given his commission on the road to Damascus and the Gentiles began to learn of this Jesus. The Jewish Christians told them fine, you need to live as we. Okay, but the interesting part of God, is that in order for God to love the Gentile and forgive the Gentile, and to save the Gentile, the Gentile could continue to be a Gentile.

This threatened to divide the church. This is why Paul writes that he is not ashamed of the gospel. The gospel is Jesus **only**. Not Jesus and Jewishness.

This is why it was so offensive to the early adopters of Jesus, who all had been Jewish their whole lives; it seemed as if their entire history and ancestry was being shoved to the side as if 1800 years of suffering from the hands of the Egyptians to the harsh environs of the Sinai, to the battle for the promised land, to the prophets, kings and priests, to the temples, cities and villages, to the law of Moses, the Ten Commandments and the sacrifice of a nation, was all for nothing.

And so Paul asks their anguished question:

“Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision?”

Romans 3: 1

If, like me, you were the oldest child in the family, this question makes the most sense of all. There was, for a short period of time, an entitlement to being the first and only child of the parents. There was a benefit to having the parents all to yourself. There was a sense of well being, knowing you were the favorite - even the chosen. BUT THEN - she was born and all the attention and oohs and awes went to her. “What am I, chopped liver?” you say. Oh whoa is me.

The division of the church was not quite as simple as healing the emotional wounds of the oldest child. Paul knew that sin and Christ’s forgiveness was the one thing that could hold the church together. Judgement, over who was better, would destroy it.

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An Oasis Of Nurture And Grace In The Name
Of Jesus Christ For All People

For Whom Christ Died

A 21st Century Approach to:
The Letter of Paul to the Romans
By: Rev. David L. Stoner



God’s Righteous Judgement

Last week we talked about Paul’s use of “Universal Sin”. Nations, Religions, Political Parties, Gender, Race, Education, Blood Type - All these things separate us. The one universal is sin. We have all sinned. As Paul writes, “...all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin, as it is written:

“There is no one who is righteous, not even one...” (Romans 3: 9-10) Because of that, God has a reason to be the righteous judge, God has not sinned, but **all** of humanity has let God down by sinning. So today we’ll study Paul’s understanding, or none understanding of judgement. Since all have sinned, who can judge? And yet, Paul tells us, because of our judgement, we’re dividing the church.

For Whom Christ Died #3 “3 Finger approach to judgement”

Romans 2: 1 - 3

Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgement on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things. You say, ‘We know that God’s judgement on those who do such things is in accordance with truth.’ Do you imagine, whoever you are, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgement of God?

Mom, taught this one to me so long ago that it might be my first memory. “Don’t judge another, because every time you point your finger at them, you point three fingers back at yourself.” Have you heard that one too? It’s true both from a theological stance as well as literal. try it. point a finger at another. Now look at your hand. Tell me, how many fingers are curled up pointing back your direction? Three.

I never really knew how theologically correct my mother was until I understood how much I did judge others. And in judging others I really was judging myself. Perhaps, you too have been the judge on occasion? Perhaps you too have seen an action of a fellow human and said in your head - shame. Or point with your finger and meant - shame. Perhaps you too have made an accusing statement to or about a brother or sister. Perhaps you too have stood around the preverbal water cooler and shared the latest gossip, condemning story, or juicy tid bit about a co-worker? Were you aware of the

three fingers pointing back at you? Did you notice your co-workers, who shared these stories, with their own three fingers pointing at themselves?

“There will be anguish and distress for everyone who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality.

All who have sinned apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but the doers of the law who will be justified.” (Rom. 1: 9 - 13)

Jews and Gentiles alike will be judged equally. Because both Jews and Gentiles have sinned equally. This is a first. Paul is using sin as a way of uniting humanity and more importantly “the Roman Church” through sin - and God’s willingness to forgive that sin - equally. Here the Jews can’t say, we deserve to have our sins forgiven, we are Jews and we know the law. Paul is saying, then you condemn yourself. If, as you say, you know the law and you don’t follow it, you are still sinning and therefore still in need of forgiveness. Like wise, Paul is saying, the Gentiles are in need of forgiveness because they too have sinned. But should God not forgive them because they do not know the law? Notice the last words Paul writes,

“For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but the doers of the law who will be justified.” (vs. 13)

Now here is the kicker, Though the Jews had heard the law, they were not any better at following it than the Gentiles who had not heard the law. Sin was the reason they were all trying to occupy the same church and receive the same forgiveness from Jesus.

Paul has made it clear that the church is to be united around the idea of sin as a condition of human experience. Therefore, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, then all are in need of the gospel, whose name is Jesus. Therefore the church in Rome and our church today is united not around the law, or around circumcision, or around dietary laws, or even around being good. The church is and always will be united around the one who universally died on the cross for the universal sin that plagues every human, whether they be Jew, Greek or American. His name is Jesus.

The church therefore, both then and now or our Future Church, is not centered around being good and getting better. The church is not focused on the good we are able to do. The church is not a place where the good congregate to talk about how bad everyone else is. No, the church is a collection of sinful people who throw themselves on the mercy of Jesus and then out of gratitude for all they have and all they have been given, go and tell the story of Jesus grace and mercy.

