

And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. 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? (Romans 2:2-3)

These verses are not teaching that displaying righteous judgment is improper; if this were the case, the Old Testament writing prophets, John the Baptist, and Paul would stand condemned. Even Jesus would stand condemned, for He frequently spoke against the sins of the Jewish people. These passages are teaching the incorrectness in passing judgment if you are practicing the same things. In other words, the man who steals, lies, or cheats is incapable of passing judgment on those who commit similar sins. The scribes and Pharisees walked away from the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11) since they were guilty of adultery themselves.

The politically correct position today (although scripturally incorrect) is tolerance at all costs, even at the expense of truth. As a result, most people sidestep conflict, refusing to involve themselves regardless of the severity of the injustice. I heard a man recently state that he knew of only two people who would address wrong, and that he never involved himself in such matters. Hence, he perceived it improper to discipline or rebuke anyone for anything, citing that no man is perfect.

He is right on one count. No person living on the earth walks in sinless perfection (1John 1:8). Only Jesus did that, and He was God-man. However, Paul instructed the church at Corinth to dis-fellowship the man who was committing sexual sin with his stepmother (1Corinthians 5:1-8) and also wrote to Timothy about rebuking sinners:

Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also may be fearful of sinning. (1Timothy 5:20)

Did Paul believe in passivity? Never! Was he fearful of conflict? Not in a million years! He consistently pointed out error in the lives of others, even with the apostle Peter (Cephas) while in Antioch:

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, "If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews? (Galatians 2:11-14)

Nevertheless, Peter wrote subsequent to this encounter, and shortly before his physical death, that Paul was his "beloved brother" in Christ (2Peter 3:15). Yes, blatant honesty, even negative input, can serve to deepen our friendships with others.

Jesus regularly condemned the Jewish leaders for their unrighteousness (Matthew 23:13-36), cleansing the temple on at least two occasions. Yet, He taught:

“Do not judge lest you be judged. (Matthew 7:1)

In Matthew 7:1, Jesus was addressing situations similar to Romans 2, where men were condemning others for sins they were committing themselves (read Matthew 7:2-5). However, people who passionately pursue God’s heart need to point out wrong when situations arise that can benefit from their input. Much wisdom is required to know when to speak and when to remain silent. Only God’s Word, anointed by the Holy Spirit, can provide discernment for one to know how to appropriately respond in all situations (Hebrews 5:14).

Paul was free to correct others because he understood his identity—who he was in Christ. (We will study this subject in depth while addressing Romans 5:1.) Paul realized that what he did was not who he was, but that who he was had a tremendous impact on what he did. He was a perfect, blameless, and holy saint, who sometimes sinned, who was not on a performance-based acceptance with God. He was a new creation who hated sin—but at the same time, was free to fail while attempting to stand for truth. In fact, should he fail while trusting God to rectify the error within the hearts of those to whom he was called to instruct, he could live with the consequence, knowing that God would honor his willingness to get involved. Indeed, Paul was not passive in his relationships with others, and paid the ultimate price that accompanies this noble undertaking (read 2Corinthians 11 and 12).

Correcting others reaps consequence, even when the correction is done in love; we open ourselves to criticism from those whom we have corrected. This “fallout” keeps many people from addressing sinful behavior, even in the confines of their own home. Thus, husbands and dads are refusing to lead, which creates the perfect environment for abundant discord. Conflict, disharmony, and resentment are impossible to rectify without compassionate and honest dialogue that points out error for the good of all parties involved.

My prayer is that we exit our study of Romans 1-8 with a compassionate boldness explained only in terms of our Savior—freeing us to be ourselves, and at the same time, speak truth to anyone who could benefit from its transforming power. After all, God corrects us for our good through His Word; yet we love and respect Him all the more:

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2Timothy 3:16-17)

Romans 2:4 is one of the most powerful verses in the entire New Testament:

Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? (Romans 2:4)

For years, I believed that a knowledge of God's wrath is the main player in bringing the lost to repentance. I then read this passage, and something clicked. Paul taught that God's "*kindness*," not His wrath, motivates the depraved to turn from sin! Do you comprehend the significance of this truth? Christ's death on the cross, along with the Father's "*kindness*" displayed through that gruesome injustice inflicted by unrighteous man, reveals to unregenerate man that "*God is love*" (1John 4:8, 16). This truth serves as a tremendous catalyst for the depraved to repent and exercise faith. Truly, the greatest motivator is God's love—never His wrath! Note: The Law convicts the lost (depraved) of their need to repent as well.

The "source" of repentance is highly debated. One school of thought holds to the following beliefs:

The depraved (lost) are so spiritually dead that they cannot exercise personal repentance and faith.

Therefore, God makes the choice for them by predestining and electing them to salvation from eternity past—by means of an eternal decree.

At God's specified time, He spiritually regenerates those who have been predestined and elected to salvation from eternity past. He follows by giving them the gift of repentance, along with the gift of faith, so they can repent, believe, and be saved.

In the above arrangement, spiritual regeneration precedes repentance and faith. Also according to this view, repentance and faith are God's gifts to those whom He has previously spiritually regenerated.

Another school, which is diametrically opposed to the view just described, subscribes to the following:

The depraved are capable of exercising their own repentance and faith prior to experiencing God's spiritual regeneration (salvation).

All people are drawn by God (John 6:44; 12:32), for God desires that all might repent, believe, and be saved (1Timothy 2:4; 2Peter 3:9). However, only the depraved who exercise personal repentance and faith will be saved (spiritually regenerated).

Which school is in agreement with the full counsel of God's Word? We will allow the Scriptures to decide.

"*Peter and the apostles*" (Acts 5:29) stated that both "*repentance*" and "*forgiveness*" have been granted to "*Israel*" (Acts 5:31):

"He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. (Acts 5:31)

The word "*Israel*" is extremely important in this context and must be properly defined, for theologians perceive the term from two polarized vantage points:

"*Israel*" points to believers only. God has washed His hands with the physical nation of Israel (the Jews) and is dealing with the church alone.

“*Israel*” points to the physical nation of Israel, the Jews, and God remains committed to the unconditional covenants He sealed with the nation.

The word “*Israel*” in Acts 5:31 points to everyone of Jewish descent, not just Jewish believers; the apostles were speaking to unsaved Jewish leaders who would have viewed “*Israel*” as pointing to the entire Jewish nation. Had “*Israel*” referenced Jewish believers only, the apostles would have stated it in the text. Yet, nothing is mentioned that could justify such a mindset. Consequently, Acts 5:31 proves that God has granted “*repentance to Israel*” in the sense that He grants every Jew the right and freedom to repent. Acts 5:31 most definitely does not teach that God is the source of repentance for any Jew who believes.

Acts 5:31 also validates unlimited atonement, for just as all Jews have been granted the right to repent, they have also been granted the right to receive “*forgiveness of sins.*” This right could not have been granted had “*forgiveness*” not been accessible to all. “*Forgiveness of sins*” is not received from God until repentance and faith are exercised. This same principle applies to the Gentiles, as is validated by Acts 11:18 and 2Timothy 2:25.

God requires repentance from those who desire to be saved. Thus, God grants the depraved the right and freedom to repent (Acts 11:18; 2Timothy 2:25); for “*repentance...leads to life*” as well as “*to the knowledge of the truth*”:

... “*Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.*” (Acts 11:18)

...*if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth,* (2Timothy 2:25)

Until the lost come to Christ through personal repentance and faith, the deeper truths of God are unattainable. The depraved (lost) possess ample truth to repent and believe; nature reveals the Godhead and His invisible attributes, so that all “*are without excuse*” who reject the Savior (Romans 1:20).

Repentance also applies to the believer’s experience subsequent to justification (salvation). Knowing the loving nature of God, we should be compelled to confess and repent soon after sins are committed. Paul writes to the church at Corinth:

For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it—for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while—I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, in order that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation; but the sorrow of the world produces death. (2Corinthians 7:8-10)

The “*repentance*” mentioned here is exercised by the believer who is walking in disobedience. This “*repentance*” leads to “*salvation*” from the power of sin. Therefore, Paul is not alluding to the “*salvation*” associated with justification (salvation from the

penalty of sin), but to “*salvation*” from the power of sin in our daily experience (three types of “*salvation*” are taught in the Scriptures—a subject addressed later). Unconfessed sin prevents us from walking in a place of close communion with the Lord which can only be restored through repentance—calling sin what it is and moving on.

We now have the context of Paul’s words in Romans 2:4:

Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?
(Romans 2:4)

The depraved do the repenting and believing. God does the saving.