

Standing in Judgment

David Carter / General Adult

Unshakeable: Romans / Romans 2:1–16

I came across a funny post online this week that made me laugh. It said something like, *“All of my childhood punishments have become my adult goals.”*

Things like eating vegetables, going to bed early, staying home, taking naps... even doing chores.

As a kid, those were the things we tried to avoid.

But as adults, we realize those things were actually meant to help us live well.

The more we mature, the more we realize we need to be challenged. We need to not just move towards the comfortable, but also to the uncomfortable, because wrestling with the uncomfortable is where true growth happens.

And I think we can do something similar with God’s Word.

We tend to gravitate toward the parts we enjoy — grace, love, forgiveness, hope. And those are beautiful and essential truths. But if that’s *all* we take in, our understanding of God becomes unbalanced.

It’s like going to a buffet and eating only dessert.

It tastes great, but it doesn’t sustain you.

God’s Word gives us a full, balanced diet of truth.

We need to wrestle with and understand the uncomfortable passages, the challenging passages like...last week, and judgment this week.

Romans 2 is one of those passages we might not naturally choose — but one we desperately need.

Because until we understand judgment, we will never fully appreciate the gospel.

Here's the question I want us to wrestle with in Romans 2:

How can anyone stand and face the judgment of God? When I meet Jesus, when I stand before God and give an account for my life, how will I stand?

Here's what Paul wants us to see today: it is only through the gospel — by faith in Christ — that we can stand in the judgment of God.

As we continue our journey through Paul's letter to the Roman church, I think we need to remember exactly why he is writing this letter.

Romans really is the clearest, most in-depth explanation of the gospel that we have in the New Testament. And the reason is simple — Paul is writing to a church that doesn't know him. He's never been there before.

So, he wants to come and establish a ministry partnership with this church. And in order to do that, he needs to make sure they understand what he believes about the gospel.

If you're going to partner with me in gospel work, we need to be on the same page about what the gospel actually is.

And in his introduction, in chapter 1 verses 16 and 17, Paul tells us exactly what he believes.

He says that he is not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes. And it saves not only because it forgives sin, but because in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed — a righteousness that comes by faith.

So, the question Paul starts wrestling with — last week and again this week — is **why**.

Why do we need the gospel?

Why do we need a Saviour?

And that's an important question, because we can never appreciate the cure until we understand the disease. We can never appreciate the solution until we understand the depth of the problem. We can never fully appreciate the good news of the gospel until we understand the bad news.

So last week Paul began diagnosing the human condition.

He showed us that apart from Christ, humanity stands under the wrath of God.

And we wrestled with that, didn't we?

Because we want a loving God. But if God is truly loving, then His love must respond to evil.

If God were to stand by and do nothing while His creation was corrupted and destroyed by sin, that wouldn't be love.

And Paul was clear — God's wrath is not mainly seen in lightning bolts from the sky, but in God giving humanity over to its desires, and all the consequences that come with that.

We see those consequences in the world around us.

His goal in writing there was not to condemn the world, but to show us **why we need the gospel**.

Now in chapter 2, Paul turns from the **wrath of God** to the **judgment of God**.

If it helps, you could think of this as *why we need the gospel — part two*.

Part 1 is we need the gospel because we are under the wrath of God, part 2 is we need the gospel because we are in danger of the judgment of God.

Without Christ, without the hope of the gospel, we are not only under God's wrath — we are under God's judgment.

You see that clearly in verse 5. Look there with me.

Romans 2:5

“But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed.”

Here's what's clear all through the Bible:

There is a day coming.

A day when every person who has ever lived will stand before God.

A day when every one of us will give an account for our lives.

And just saying that raises tension for us, doesn't it?

A loving God... and judgment.

But love that never responds to injustice is not love at all.

The same love that moves God to rescue us in the gospel is the love that requires Him to judge what destroys His creation.

So that raises the question Paul is pressing on us this morning.

If judgment is inevitable —

If every one of us will stand before God —

How can anyone stand in the judgment of God?

And here's the first thing Paul shows us in verses 1–5.

I don't stand by comparison.

I stand in repentance.

I STAND IN REPENTANCE

Look with me at verse 1.

Romans 2:1 ESV

Therefore, you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things.

As we open up chapter 1 the tone switches do you notice that? Did you notice that Paul has gone from talking in very general terms using impersonal pronouns to using personal pronouns?

Like if we read the list of sin at the end of chapter 1, Paul talks very generally, the idea is the people out there.

He says in verse 29 they were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, they were full of envy, murder, and strife. They were gossips, slanderers, and sexually impure.

And the assumption is that there would be those who hear or read Paul's words and are saying amen Paul! Give it to them! That's right! It's about time someone told them about how foul they are.

But do you notice the shift in personal pronouns, he moves from they, to you.

You have no excuse, o man, every one of *you*, because *you* practice the very same things.

It's easy isn't it, to point the finger out there in the world, or over there at your neighbour, yeah, I know they do all that stuff, but not me.

I'm not as bad as they are Paul. Tell them Paul, but don't tell me.

It's easy isn't it, as we're driving down the 401 and we see someone zooming past us and we think, "Man I hope the cops get them." But it's a different story when we are in a rush and the circumstances force us to make the choice to speed, different when we get pulled over, isn't it?

Paul's words remind us of Jesus when he says do not try to take the speck out of your brother's eye, while you got a plank, a 2x4 hanging out of your own. It's a great image, isn't it?

See, when we start to compare ourselves to other people, it's easy to make ourselves look good. You can always find someone who may be worse off than you are.

But the standard of righteousness that God requires is not that I may be average in righteousness or even above average. The standard of righteousness is the righteousness of God.

But Paul's point is while you're out there comparing yourself to the people around you, you aren't as good as you think you are. The point that Paul is giving here is to take your eyes off the world, take your eyes of the crowd and examine your own life, your own heart.

He says in verse 2, look there.

Romans 2:2-3 ESV

We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God?

He says you're right, they do deserve the judgment of God, and God will judge them, but do you think that you will escape God's judgment, when you are guilty of the exact same things?

What does he mean by that? How can he know that these people practice the sins they are judging others for?

Now he could be talking about hypocrites, two faced people who are living a double life and that may be the case. Like maybe you are sitting their pointing the finger at the sexual immoral while you are practicing sexual immorality yourself, or maybe you are pointing the finger at the greedy and the gossip and the disobedient, but you are guilty of those exact same sins yourself.

And in that case, it would be true, how can you judge when you do the exact same thing?

Or it could be that you just don't realize that you struggle with those sins. And Paul is trying to say you don't think you're struggling with this sin, you don't think you're guilty. Look harder and you'll find that what frustrates and annoys us about other people is often things we don't like about ourselves.

But I think it's deeper than that. I think where Paul is driving at is the same things Jesus was driving at in His Sermon on the Mount.

When Jesus said to the crowds you have heard that you shall not murder and rightfully so, but I tell you everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment.

You have heard it was said, you shall not commit adultery, but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery in his heart.

Jesus is saying the righteousness that God demands is not just that I refrain from an action, but what's going on in my heart. Do you have hatred, have you ever wished that someone would die, have you ever thought evil thoughts about another person?

No, you may not have committed adultery, but have you ever lusted after someone who wasn't your spouse, have you ever fantasized about what it would be like, if you have, you've committed adultery in your heart.

This is what Paul is getting at, you may not be out there in the world doing all the evil that is going on, but the infection of sin runs far deeper than just our actions, right? It's about the heart, because that's where all sin begins, before we carry out an action, it always starts with an unrighteous desire.

And the power of the gospel isn't just to change our actions and habits, but to transform our hearts.

And if that's the righteousness that is required to stand and face the judgment of God, how do I stand? How do I stand and not fall?

I stand not in comparison to others, but only in repentance.

I think Paul gives us that answer in verse 4. Do you see it?

Romans 2:4 ESV

Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

Right now, judgment is being withheld, right now humanity is experiencing the kindness of God, kindness because of His forbearance, which means not that God is tolerating, but He is bearing with us. He is being patient, giving us time.

Not so that we can continue to chase after sin, but God's kindness is meant to lead us to repentance.

Repentance is a recognizing and confessing my sinful state, it's recognizing my need for a saviour, my need for God's forgiveness and seeking after Him.

It's the difference between the religious self-righteous Pharisee standing in the temple and naming off all the good deeds he has done and the sinful tax collector on his knees before the Lord beating his chest crying out Lord have mercy on me a sinner!

Lord, I am a sinful man, a sinful woman, and I need your mercy, your grace. That's the only way I can stand, not in my own righteousness, because I have none, but only in yours.

Am I standing by comparing myself to others or am I standing in repentance before God?

That brings us to the second point of our passage this morning. How can I stand in the judgment of God? Only in repentance.

Secondly, not in my righteousness, but only in Christ's righteousness.

IN CHRIST'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

I stand not in my own righteousness, but in Christ's.

We read verses 6-11.

Romans 2:6-11 ESV

He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honour and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality.

There will come a day when each person who has ever lived will stand before God, and we will be held accountable.

That part is undeniable. It's unavoidable.

And Paul tells us what that judgment will look like.

He says each one will be rendered, or dealt with, according to their works.

Two choices.

Those who have lived their lives in patient, well-doing, seeking glory and honour and life with God — they are granted eternal life.

But those who are self-seeking, who do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness — those who reject God and live for themselves — will face wrath and fury, tribulation, and distress.

That's sobering.

That's real.

And if we're honest, at this point something feels off.

Because everything Paul has said so far about the gospel — and everything he will say later — tells us that we do not earn our salvation by our works.

So how do we reconcile that with what we just read?

Is Paul saying that we earn our way into eternal life?

That's the tension — and Paul *wants us to feel it.*

Remember again what he's doing, where he's at in this letter.

He wants us to know why we need the gospel.

He is not yet explaining the gospel, he is saying to us if you do not have Jesus, if you do not have what Jesus offers, this is what you're left with, you will be judged according to your deeds and it's only those who have done good who will enter eternal life and those who have done evil will enter eternal tribulation.

Here's what Paul's teaching does away with.

It does away with the idea that God weighs our good deeds against our bad deeds.

That's kind of the idea of even some religions that God at the end will be sitting there with a scale and on one side of the scale is our good stuff and the other side is our bad stuff and we just kind of sit there fingers crossed... "Oh man, I hope, I hope that I've done enough good stuff."

It does away with the idea that God somehow grades us on a scale, doesn't it? That you know, I've done some bad things in my life, but the overall trajectory of my life has been on the up and up.

Like, let me ask you is that justice? If God judged like that, would He be just?

Imagine if our justice system worked like that. Like, you know I robbed a bank or murdered someone, and they brought me before the court and the judge said, "Well, I know he did this one thing, but overall, he's a pretty good guy? Just don't do it again."

No, you are either innocent or you're guilty and that's what Paul is outlining here.

Without Jesus, without the gospel, here is what we're left with.

You stand before God and it is up to your righteousness, and folks, I don't have to look at your life; I just look at mine.

And I say, man, there is a lot more of me leaning on the self-seeking, not obeying the truth side.

Left to my own righteousness, I have no right to stand.

The Psalmist ask in **Psalm 130:3**

If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?

Remember, remember what the gospel says, remember, what the gospel does, do you remember?

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God to save... for in it the righteousness of God is revealed, do you remember that?

The righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel. It means that not only is God's righteousness put on display, but the path to righteousness is revealed.

And we'll get there once we hit Romans 3... in order to see this clearly, we need to see it through the eyes of the gospel.

When in Romans 3 Paul says this...

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe...

Do you see? This is the only way to stand, we can't stand in our righteousness, we will fall. The only way that you and I will be able to stand and face the judgment of God is if we are clothed by faith in the righteousness of Christ!

That's why we need the gospel... because without Christ there isn't enough lifetimes to live for you and me to gain the righteousness we need.

Paul will tell us later there is none righteous, not even one.

But the glory of the gospel is this...

2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Here's the question to ask yourself this morning...

When you stand before God and give an account for your life... whose righteousness will you be standing in? In Christ's? Or your own?

We stand in Christ's righteousness and not our own.

If I stand in my righteousness, will I be able to stand at all?

Now, if that's true —

if we don't stand in our own righteousness but in Christ's —
then there's one more thing Paul wants us to see.

Because that also changes how we think about justice.

Here's the final thing Paul shows us in our passage this morning, one more thing to see.

I don't stand on justice; I stand on grace...

I STAND ON GRACE

That's the only way we can stand and face God's judgment, not on justice, but on grace.

See here's what we can be absolutely sure about. Is that God is perfect, righteous, and just in His judgment.

God will deliver perfect justice.

Let me share with you the two reasons that Paul gives.

The first one is in verse 11 there do you see it?

For God shows no partiality...

There is no favouritism in God, there is no bias. He cannot be swayed or manipulated in His judgment by outside factors.

You and I are, aren't we? We make judgments based upon looks, first appearances and words when we have no idea of the motive.

Like, there is a reason that when defendants come into court, they don't come dressed in their street clothes, they come in a suit, looking professional and well dressed, why?

Because the jury needs to see this is a respectable person, we are swayed. Human judges can be swayed. I don't like the way that person spoke to me or looked at me or reacted to a certain situation.

But God is perfectly just in His judgment because He shows no partiality. He simply looks at the facts; He looks at the evidence. Guilty, or innocent.

But not only does God show no partiality, nothing is hidden from His sight. He knows everything about every person.

Look at verse 16,

Romans 2:16 ESV

On that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

On that day, all the secrets we keep will be laid bare, God doesn't just judge impartially, He judges internally.

He can see and knows our thoughts, our motives, our hearts, our desires, like nothing is hidden from His sight.

He is omniscient and omnipresent; He is all knowing.

See the problem with you and I, or any human judge standing in judgment, is that we don't have all the facts, we don't see it from every angle, from every perspective.

I love watching the show Law and Order, especially when they get into the trial piece of it. And the DA or in our case the Crown Attorney, presents all the

evidence against the defendant. The job of the defender is to cast doubt on that evidence, can you really be sure that's what you saw, how do you know it wasn't this, have you considered that this is an alternative way to view that evidence?

You can't do that with God... He sees all the evidence clearly.

He is perfectly just in all His judgments; there will be no one in that day who can look at how God judged each individual and say that's not fair.

That's our concern, isn't it?

Will God be fair in His judgment? One of the questions often asked is well what about those who have never heard the gospel, what about those who have never heard of God or the Bible?

Paul answers that here for us.

Romans 2:12 ESV

For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.

Paul is saying this, that for those who have never heard the gospel, never heard about God's law, He will judge them without the law.

How will He do that? Verse 14.

Romans 2:14–15 ESV

For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.

People all over the world have what's called a conscience, it's that voice in your head, that burden on your heart, which tells you this isn't right, this is wrong.

Now granted, depending on where you were born, or where you live, that sense of right and wrong may differ, but there are some universal right and wrongs. For instance, all cultures from everywhere would agree that it is wrong to unjustly take the life of another person, or it's wrong to harm, to deceive, to abuse another person.

It's wrong to take what doesn't belong to you... you see we all have this sense of right and wrong; we're born with it.

And conscience can be seared, it can be twisted, it can be ignored, but it's there. See, the question we must ask ourselves is, where did that come from? Where does this sense of right and wrong, moral, and immoral come from?

The only answer is that it came from God, God placed it there, and for those who don't know God's law they will be judged according to that inner conscience that tells them, this is wrong.

But what about those who do know God's law, or know God's Word, doesn't that give them a bit of an advantage? No, not really.

Notice what Paul says in verse 13.

Romans 2:13 ESV

For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.

Just because you hear God's Word it doesn't give you an advantage. Knowing God's Word doesn't give you an advantage, it's not the hearing of God's Word that makes you right before Him.

The question is, have you lived it; does it impact your life at all?

See, the sense then isn't that those who know God's truth will be given an advantage, it actually seems to imply that we will be judged more harshly, because we know the truth, heard the truth, understood the truth, but still refused to believe it.

It's a dangerous thing to sit in the church week after week, hearing the truth of God's Word preached but still refusing to believe it and obey it.

You have no excuse.

See, it's always a question of fairness, always a question of justice.

When we stand before God in the day of judgment, will we be judged fairly.

But can I tell you, you don't want that. I don't want that.

Do you know, because if you and I face justice on the day of judgment, we will face condemnation. That's the justice we deserve.

Because all the evidence says we're guilty! We saw it last week, we have rejected God, replaced God, and chosen to live a life without Him.

And if you choose a life without God, God will not force Himself on you, He will give you exactly what you want, for all eternity, life without Him!

That's justice!

Can I tell you; I don't want justice, I want grace.

See Grace, grace is what the gospel gives you. Grace means we receive that which we don't deserve.

Grace is more than mercy, mercy is when someone has pity on you, grace is when someone gives you greater than you deserve.

If you get pulled over by the police for speeding and the police office gives you a break, he's shown you mercy. But if the police officer says not only will I give you a break, but I'm also going to give you a police escort so that you can go as fast you need to go...

that's grace.

See when I stand on the day of judgment, my hope, my prayer is that God would give me grace.

I don't deserve to enter into eternity and live with Him forever. I don't.

But grace is that He gives me greater than I deserve...

How? How is that possible?

See, this is why we need to understand judgment and wrath.

You cannot understand what the cross of Christ means, you cannot understand what Jesus accomplished on the cross until you understand this, understand wrath and judgment.

Because on the cross Jesus took on the wrath that I deserve, He took on the judgment that I deserve, He died the death that I deserve for my sin.

He took it all on... so that by faith, I can receive grace.

The cross is where the love of God meets the justice of God.

Because justice demands that sin be paid for, and the wrath of God satisfied.

We see that on the cross.

But love is shown in that God provided a way for justice to be satisfied and grace shown towards you and me.

My friend you and I have only two choices when it comes to the judgment of God.

We can stand in that day of judgment and face God and face justice in our own strength, in our own righteousness, in our own sin and face eternity in condemnation.

Or

We can stand on that day in Christ... knowing that Christ has paid for all my sin, He took on the wrath, the judgment that I deserve, and I stand clothed in His righteousness and not my own.

It is only through the gospel — by faith in Christ — that we can stand in the judgment of God.

By the gospel I stand in repentance, by faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ, I stand in His righteousness and not my own.

By faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ, I can stand in grace, because He has satisfied God's justice.

I cannot, I cannot leave here today without urging you, pleading with you.

If you have not placed your eternal trust, faith and reliance on the death and resurrection of Jesus, that you would not leave here today without doing so.

Right there, seated you can do it.

You can come as we close out the service, we will have the prayer team here ready to pray with you.