**God’s Kindness Leads Us to Repentance**

Romans 2:1–3:20

Key Verse: 2:4, 3:20

*Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?*

*Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.*

Last week we saw how our darkened hearts are in desperate need of Jesus. And we learned that as we come to Him, He gives us a heart of flesh and a heart of worship. In today’s passage we look deeper into the condition of our hearts and lives, and as we delve into the reality of our hearts, we begin to understand the depth of God’s kindness, grace and His love. This kindness that leads us to repentance. This grace that forgives. This love that leads us to righteousness. I ask today that we may all look at ourselves honestly and before God. I pray we may come before God with a contrite, soft heart that God’s grace may penetrate so deeply, we would be eternally scarred by his love. I pray that we would turn from our selfish lives and live lives that are moved by Him.

**Part 1. God’s truth to the Religious (2:1-16)**

In chapter 1, Paul revealed how the pagan Gentile people had rejected God and how they gave themselves deeper into immorality. As Paul rebuked the Gentile world, his message was probably enthusiastically supported by the Jewish community. But the reason for their support was simply because they were Gentiles, and they probably believed they were exempt from such condemnation because they were Jews. To clarify, I’m not giving an anti-Semitic message today. Any proud religious person would respond the same way when reading Romans 1. To focus in on all those who live debaucherous lives and say that God’s wrath is alleviated off of them because they live piously by the Word of God. But it’s because of this pride and also the subtlety of sin, all religious people can become completely deluded. So in chapter 2, Paul speaks to the Jews (and all religious people) that they are not only missing the point of the gospel, but the heart of the gospel. Paul rips apart their self-proclaimed righteousness and reveals the truth that God’s wrath is waiting upon all people who reject his grace. But to all those who come to repentance there is life.

Look at vs. 1-3

*You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.* ***2*** *Now we know that God’s judgment against those who do such things is based on truth.* ***3*** *So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God’s judgment?*

Paul makes it very clear that from the beginning that no one has an excuse and can escape God’s judgment if we ourselves judge others. We often see in the bible that the Jewish and religious leaders were constantly judging others. They judged Jesus, they judged the “sinners”, they judge anybody who had not been disciplined and trained as they did. This is a problem of all religious people. When one has a very high view of their spiritual state, they begin to judge others who do not either follow their standard, or who do not do as they do. We all judge one another, in fact, I can guarantee you that at one point, we’ve all judged someone else in this room. You may even be judging me right now! So what Paul says in vs. 1, is that we all cannot escape God’s judgment, and by judging others we are in fact bringing condemnation on ourselves. Why? Because we who pass judgment are doing the same things that we are judging others for.

We need to really understand the seriousness of judging others. First off, judging others is a stark alarm to the dying conditions of our souls. When we judge others, we are no longer acknowledging the sins within ourselves. We become calloused to the wretchedness of sin, and we excuse ourselves for committing them. We become calloused towards others, and write them off as wicked, and we condemn them for their sins. Essentially we become heartless people who no longer value them as souls but as objects of wrath. Lastly, we become calloused towards God. We think that God’s judgment is not upon ourselves, we no longer live in holy fear before God, but with great pride we think that we can fool God and trick him like little kids who commit secret sins. But the truth is, we are only fooling ourselves. God is the one true righteous judge and God judges each person according to what they have done (v6)

Personally for me, when I see a proud person, my natural instinct is to humble them, ironically this only exemplifies my own pride. But when we look at how God responds to pride we are blown away. Let’s read vs. 4 together

*Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?*

This is God’s response; he shows kindness, forbearance, and patience. I want to take a moment to think about what this verse teaches us about God’s patience. First it teaches us that although we deserve destruction every day, we never get what we deserve. God the righteous judge does not execute us as quickly as he has a right to. Forbearance means, tolerance and restraint in the face of provocation. Despite our rebelliousness and deliberate rejection, he does not retaliate immediately. Second, it teaches us that the most patient and loving thing God can do is to bring us to repentance. Rather than writing us off, he desires to bring us to repentance, why? So that he can shower us with life. So that we would taste the sweetness of restoration, and have unity with God for eternity. The other day Josh and I were in the car together and David was in the back. David, who was tired and hungry, began screaming at the top of his lungs. He has a very supersonic scream. My immediate thought was, this boy needs a good hard spanking and then make him walk home. Josh had the similar thoughts, but he did something different. He spanked him and told him what he did wrong, and then hugged him saying I love you. I was really impressed by the way he disciplined David, and I believe Josh’s intention is to bring David to repentance. This is really the most patient and loving thing our Father can do, is to bring us to repentance and restore us that we can grow in maturity and His love.

How does God’s kindness lead us to repentance? The best way I can understand this is to share my personal experience. In California, we have carpool lanes on the highway. What that is, is a lane designated for people driving with 2 or more people only. It’s a privileged lane that you can drive as a reward for carpooling. Often times it moves much faster than regular lanes. If you break the law and drive in this lane with only yourself, the ticket ranges from $480-1000, depending on the extent of your violation. Well, one day, I woke up late for school, and it takes me two hours to drive on the highway because of traffic. Because of this, I concluded that just this once I should just drive in the carpool lane. So, I put a sweatshirt over the passenger seat, and put a hat on the headrest to give the illusion that someone was driving in the car with me. I hopped on the highway and got in the carpool lane and started speeding down. At first I was nervous but after 10 mins I was happy that I beat the law. Just then in the corner of my eye I saw a cop way back a couple of lanes away from me. I began to get worried so I decided that just in case I would get out of the carpool lane. As I did I saw the cop switching lanes. Getting more worried I decided, I’ll just get off the highway... as I started switching lanes more frantically, the sirens started going off. Immediately I started sweating and my life flashed before my eyes. I had already two tickets in the past 3 months, and this would be my third strike which would mean my license being taken away. Not only that, I would have to pay this hefty fine. So no means of transportation, would lead to no means of going to school, leading to no means of getting a career, no marriage, no kids,  the rest of my life is screwed. As I pulled over, I was thinking of excuses to say, the cop came up to my window and asked me why I was in the carpool lane. I said that I got on by accident and was trying to get off. He then said, that I was lying and that he was following me for 10 mins. Then he looked over and saw my passenger seat with a sweater and hat on, and asked if I was trying to impersonate a passenger in my car. I freaked out because I totally forgot about it. I didn't say a word I was just so trapped in my guilt. He told me the charges for impersonating a passenger is up to $1000 and impounding my car. He took my license and said he’d come back with my ticket. At that moment I felt so low, so deep in my guilt that all I could do was pray. I begged God to forgive me, and swore that I would never do this again. I told God that if he would get me out of this that I would dedicate my life to him. Just then, the cop came back fairly quickly, handed me my license and said, “It’s your lucky day, I just got a call that there was a fatal accident and I have to go to the scene immediately.” And then, he let me go without a ticket. I was so stunned that I didn't know what to say I just kept saying thank you, thank God, thank you, thank God. I think I even cried. I sat there even repenting more because I was so amazed of God’s immediate grace that he showed even though I didn’t deserve it. This story although silly really has been ingrained in my heart, and is something I will not forget because it was just one of many times that God showed grace to me. And remembering this grace reminds me that I am not deserving of the kindness he shows, that I do deserve judgment for my evil and wretched heart, yet he shows this grace that I may come to repentance, restoration and grow in his love, to show this kindness to others. God shows his kindness that we would be changed thoroughly and that we would not be motivated by fear but out of great gratitude towards Him. I pray that we may not take for granted the kindness that he shows; rather may our hearts be moved to humility to repent before him always.

But there are two sides to God, He shows all people unending kindness, but for those who reject his kindness there is wrath. God’s judgment is just and he looks at each person individually as he judges.

Look at vs. 5-11. First off, God does not show favoritism. Whether Jew or Gentile, black or white, pretty or ugly, we all fall under the same judgment. In vs. 5-6 Paul reveals that an unrepentant heart leads to God’s wrath and that God will repay each person according to what they have done. Here, Paul points out that what we do is very important.

*“To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.* ***8*** *But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.* ***9*** *There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil...* ***10*** *but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good...”*

We need to first clarify that this verse is not in any way implying salvation by works. Rather Paul is revealing our hearts condition in what we pursue and what we do as a result of salvation, not a means to gain it. One who persists in doing good, seek glory, honor and immortality, someone who not only is constantly pursuing a life of God, he is persistent and active in revealing a life that pleases him. This person is a living example of someone who is genuinely changed and moved by God daily. And to this person God gives eternal life, glory, honor and peace. But to the one who is self-seeking and who rejects the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil. Someone who is actively seeking evil, who intentionally rejects truth, is only storing up the wrath of God on themselves. This person is someone who no longer views sin as sin, nor does he acknowledge God’s existence. He has made the decision to completely denounce his presence in his life and proudly and stubbornly does not open his heart at all to truth. God gives him every chance but it is his decision that brings wrath upon himself.

God’s judgment is just and it is real. Just as his kindness is evident in our lives, we also must not neglect God’s judgment and wrath towards unrepentant hearts. These verses demand us to look at our own lives and see how we respond to God’s wrath and his kindness. Do I truly see myself as a sinner? Do I really deserve wrath? Do I really know God’s grace and forgiveness? Or am I taking everything and Him for granted? I want us to take a moment to really stop and look at our current lives and how we live. Now compare it to the first time you met Jesus, the first time you accepted Him as Savior and acknowledged him as Lord of your life. I know that when i compare the two there is a great difference. I once lived in desperation of Jesus. Needing him daily in my life. Thirsting and searching after him out of a desire to not only be healed but to know Him deeply. Feeling so sorry for sinning against him, and feeling so grateful in knowing that I’m forgiven by Him. But what about now? Where is the desperation for Jesus I once had? I think we’ve lost sight of who we really are before God, and in turn we no longer live with this eagerness to draw near to Him. And this has greatly affected how we live each and every day. But we thank God for this passage, we thank God for using Paul to remind us that we must not show contempt towards God’s kindness but we must come back to repentance and really live out our lives in the grace that he has shown us. To live with this never ending thirst to be satisfied by him, to be healed by him, to enjoy just being in his presence, to long to talk to him, to listen to him, to worship and adore Him. I pray today, we can come back to this life that we once had, and come out of this path of self-righteous pride we are on, and come to God who is full of kindness and patience in repentance and deep gratitude. Amen.

Look at vs 11-16, As mentioned before, God does not show favoritism. Both Jew and Gentile will be shown kindness and will also be shown wrath based on what they do. He supports this with the gospel truth that whether they are under the law or apart, they will be judged accordingly. No one is exempt from his grace, and no one escapes from his punishment. This is why Paul says in vs 12 that it is not a matter of simply having the law, but it’s about obeying the law. So even if they are the chosen Jewish people, just because they were given the law doesn’t mean that because of this they get a free ticket. They are called to obey it. And in the same way those who don’t have the law (the Gentiles) they too also by nature have a “golden rule” by which they follow. If someone cuts in line they get upset, why because there is a golden rule that everyone knows that it is wrong. All people know the essential principles of right and wrong behavior and that they are based in an objective reality, a standard by which we are to be judged. So what Paul tries to make clear is that all are under the righteous judge Jesus who sees all things, judges all people, whether they have the law or not, and most of all will judge all their secrets as well. If this scares you that he will judge your secrets then there’s something clearly that you need to repent of and bring forth before God. We must all know that just because we are part of this community, or we’ve made a public confession of faith, this doesn’t mean that we are still exempt from all our secret sins. Christ will judge all things, therefore we must be purified in every exposed and hidden sin we have. If not we will begin to live hypocritical lives.

**Part 2: Hypocrisy and the Law (2:17-29)**

After touching upon the issue of pride, Paul then moves on to deal with hypocrisy. This hypocrisy was prevalent in those who were extremely legalistic with the law, and here Paul points it out in order that they would see their falsehood, and the need to come before God honestly.  Let’s read vs. 17-24 all together,

*Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and boast in God;* ***18*** *if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law;* ***19*** *if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark,* ***20*** *an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of little children, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth—* ***21*** *you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal?* ***22*** *You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?* ***23*** *You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law?* ***24*** *As it is written: “God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”*

Wow, this seems incredibly harsh, and straight up mean. But Paul points out the hypocrisy that the Jewish leaders hid behind. He calls out everything that they relied on for righteousness. Their national identity as God’s chosen people, the knowledge and experts of his law, being in leadership positions, and instructor and teacher of others, these were all things that they hid behind and used as a justification for their righteousness. But he says to them, “you then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself?” You who preach against stealing do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols do you rob temples? You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? The Holy Spirit was really speaking through Paul, digging deep into their hearts and confronting them with the reality that they were misusing the law, and their self-righteousness was leading them to their condemnation.

When we look at this verse, we can see that the Holy Spirit still rebukes us today. Do we see ourselves as Christians, take pride in the fact that we serve God, we suffer for him, that we lead bible studies, or struggle against sin, do we pride ourselves in the fact that we tithe, or that we attend service faithfully, never miss a testimony, or faithfully take communion? Have we reduced God and our relationship to just acts of duty and service? And yet do we still not repent of our pride, the sins we commit against God, do we not teach ourselves before others, do we not remove the plank in our own eye before others, are we secretly hiding sins, leading people into lust or immorality, because of our own desires, yet preaching that it’s wrong? Are we dishonoring God by the way we live? Vs. 24 says, if so, “God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.

Paul isn’t joking around right now. He’s revealing just how serious we need to take our lives of faith. We may think its ok to have a lax attitude towards our sins, or it’s acceptable to have a mediocre relationship with God and his words, but it’s not. When we have this attitude and way of life, we are blaspheming God’s name, and to non-believers, we are misrepresenting God. We are becoming a source of discouragement to non-believers. They see our lives and the hypocrisy we live in and will ask, why would I want to be a Christian? The owner of my company once said that this is what he hated about Christianity and any organized religion, all the hypocrisy and double lives. And this is what majority of non-believers will mention when they think about Christianity, and unfortunately it’s true. Although God himself is not the one who is hypocritical, but because of the people who represent him are, they are turned off to Him.

So, Paul is encouraging us to live in truth. To really let the words of God work, don’t let God and your relationship become an accessory to your life. If you’re going to call yourself a Christian, if you yourself made a decision to be his child, and to serve him, then take this new identity seriously. That’s what Paul is saying here. Stop relying on external acts as a way to justify your “goodness” or spiritual life. All these things cannot make you righteous or a Christian. It is condition of your heart.

This is why Paul begins to talk about circumcision of the heart. Let’s look at vs. 25-29

*Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised.* ***26*** *So then, if those who are not circumcised keep the law’s requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised?* ***27*** *The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker.*

***28*** *A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical.* ***29*** *No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person’s praise is not from other people, but from God.*

Outward acts do nothing for God and nothing for us. These outward acts do not change our hearts. It doesn't give us a lasting change to who we are.  These outward actions like circumcision only have meaning if our hearts are circumcised by the spirit. Therefore to be really a new creation we need a real encounter and relationship with God. We need the grace of Jesus, and to be completely filled with and dependent on this grace and forgiveness.

As vs. 29 states, it’s all about the circumcision of the heart. God values, and cares about the circumcision of our hearts not just outward acts. He already knows what’s really within you, what you’re really thinking, so there’s no point in trying to fake it. So if you’re just going through the motions today, if you’re just pretending, if you’re not really committing then know that you’re not benefiting anyone, especially God and yourself. God wants you to be a new creation in Him; he wants you to have life, to be restored, renewed, and to be real.

**Part 3: God is faithful, no one is Righteous**

In vs. 1-8 Paul addresses any possible argument against God’s faithfulness. Here Paul addresses the Gentiles teaching them also not to despise the Jews, and not to twist the meaning of God’s grace as a license to sin. Some people were making foolish arguments by basically saying that if God’s righteousness is revealed in his wrath against sin, we might as well sin more so that his righteousness can be revealed more! Ultimately this reveals their true and ultimate desire to sin intentionally and using God as an excuse to justify their sins. It reveals the depravity of their minds, and how lost they were to sin. And in vs. 9-20 Paul describes one who is completely under the power of sin, and the affects that it has on one’s soul. Look at vs. 10-18, when we are under the power of sin, no one is righteous, no one understands nor seeks God. All have turned away, are worthless, no one does good. Their throats tongues, lips, mouths and feet are instruments of evil, there is no peace within them, and worst of all they do not have the fear of God. Sin devastates our souls, and leaves us desolate, and transforms us into sources of wickedness. Essentially we become more and more like Satan. And so Paul reiterates the fact that such a serious condition cannot be resolved by implementing the law, but only one’s recognition of sin through the law, leading to repentance can bring about true righteousness and life.

Look at vs. 20, *Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.* The law only reveals the conditions of our hearts, makes us conscious of our sins. God did not give the law to use for their own gain, to use it to judge others, nor did he give it to replace Him. And yet the Jews sadly lost the whole picture and the beauty of God’s plan to bring back his people to Him. In the same way, it’s easy for us to use the gospel to justify ourselves, or use it to judge and condemn others. We even believe by legalistically following God’s words that we gain righteousness from our sins. But as Paul reveals, the law was only a means to reveal our sins in the same way we are to remember that it’s God himself who can forgive us of our sins and cleanse us, therefore it is by coming to Him that we are made righteous. Therefore in coming to his words, we should not try to use it as a tool to condemn others, boost our own egos, or preach it but not practice it, rather we should allow the words of God to penetrate our lives deeply, transform us, listen and obey it that it would guide us and lead us not only to repentance but to a relationship with God. I pray that we may study these words in humility and may these words bring us to our knees in repentance that truly God may work in our lives and declare us righteous through Jesus. Amen.

As we think about this passage, I pray that we can come to know the depth of God’s kindness in our lives. That this would lead us to deep repentance and a sense of awe and gratitude for the patience he’s shown us. I pray that we face the truth within ourselves, accurately gauging where we stand before God that we would come to see what a desperate need we have for Him. Amen.