

PREAMBLE

THE GROUND IS LEVEL AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS

I believe it is necessary to begin by establishing our individual and collective need for the gospel of Jesus Christ, the good news that we need now more today than ever before in history. Many approach the subjects of sexual sin and abortion with disgust for not only the acts, but also for the people who participate in these things. I think it is vital that we nip this in the bud from the very start.

Not even the most righteous among us will escape God's wrath for our sins without accepting the gift of salvation by the precious blood of Christ. I urge you to read the book of Romans. It states the facts more clearly than I can. Romans 1 points out God's wrath against *all* humanity. Romans 2 gets right to the point about judging others when we ourselves are guilty, because if we keep all the law but fail in one point, we are deserving of His wrath. Romans 3 addresses the fact that none of us are righteous on our own. *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*¹ We are not justified by keeping the law. The law simply points out our sin and our need for a savior. We are justified by faith in the only One who has the power to justify us, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who poured out His blood as payment for our trespasses.

Though this class is not a study of the book of Romans, Romans 3 sets the premise for the entire course. We must approach these complicated subjects from a standpoint of humility, all of us as sinners saved by grace.

We ALL need Jesus. Even the most righteous among us. When we judge others as worse sinners than we are, we don't consider the mercy of God on ourselves. When those who arrive late in their realization of their need for Jesus are given the same gift of forgiveness and salvation, we who showed up early and did many things well all along tend to think we deserve His grace more. (See the parable of the workers in the vineyard Matthew 20:1-16.) But God, the Giver of Grace doesn't see it that way. Let's lovingly remind one another of Romans 3 when we are tempted to condemn others.

IS THERE ANY PLACE FOR HUMAN JUDGMENT?

Much of church practice over the ages has leaned more toward head knowledge and being "right" than community and service in the love of Christ. His greatest commandments must be our primary endeavors as the church - to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love others as ourselves.²

This leaves no room for our judgment of those who do not belong to the family of God. That part is solely God's responsibility.³ Jesus came not to condemn the world but to save it,⁴ While we tend to

¹ Romans 3:23.

² Matthew 22:37-39.

³ 1 Corinthians 5:12.

⁴ John 3:17.

jump to judgment, His purpose is first to redeem because He desires that not one of His wandering sheep perishes!⁵ He calls us to pray for our enemies,⁶ do justice, love mercy, walk humbly,⁷ *speaking the truth in love*,⁸ *show mercy, mixed with fear – hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh*,⁹ and *rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering towards slaughter*.¹⁰

God is the ultimate Judge, both of those who do not choose Him and those who do, including ourselves. There is a place for judgment in the family of God because He has given us the ability to discern evil and recognize behavior in ourselves and others that does not honor His Word. We have a responsibility, as Believers in Christ, to lovingly confront a brother or sister living in sin. Jesus gives explicit instructions about this in Matthew 18:15-17. It must first be done privately. If they don't listen, take two or three witnesses. If they still don't listen, then bring it to the church. If they don't listen to the church, then we are to treat them as a pagan. Paul also gives clear instructions in Galatians 6:1 that the confrontation must be by someone living by the Spirit and should be a matter of gentle restoration, not condemnation, watching that we don't fall into temptation ourselves.

Paul continues in Galatians 6 to command us to carry each other's burdens. In the area of sexual sin, there is often more to the story. People carry sexual burdens from childhood abuse or wrong thinking about the subject or themselves. With abortion there is always more to the story. Before we jump to judgment, we must become a trusted friend who can help another unpack all the confusion and lovingly bring it into the light of the Word.

If all we do is judge someone in comparison to ourselves and gossip about them, that kind of judgment is entirely unbiblical and a sin that brings us under God's judgment. At that point, we are not living in the Spirit and have no business confronting or judging anyone. That's what Jesus meant when He said in Matthew 5:1-2:

"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ²For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

We ought to take this very seriously. If we are not willing to approach people and situations Biblically and lovingly, then we have no business even thinking judgmental thoughts about them.

Relationship is key: our relationship with God and others. If we are not in right relationship with God because of our own sin or lack of love for others, we have no place to judge anyone else. If we do not have enough love for our brother or sister to gently restore them, then we must recuse ourselves from trying to straighten them out. The Bible says a whole lot more about loving one another than it does about judging others. If we don't love, then we don't even know God, because GOD IS LOVE!¹¹

One of the most fantastic passages in the New Testament is this: *"So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting people's sins*

⁵ Matthew 18:12.

⁶ Matthew 5:44.

⁷ Micah 6:8.

⁸ Ephesians 4:15.

⁹ Jude 23, NIV.

¹⁰ Proverbs 24:11, NIV.

¹¹ 1 John 4:8.

*against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God. God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."*¹²

¹² 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 NIV.