

In step with Jesus 162

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Key Text: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.” (2 Corinthians 5:10)

Introduction

Romans chapter one introduced us to our need for God’s amazing grace. In it, Paul described the pitiable human condition under the bondage of Satan and introduced the power of the gospel to free us from Satan’s imprisonment. While preaching God’s gift of grace, Paul also presented God’s judgment or just reward against all unrighteousness. Not wanting to leave his listeners to guess what unrighteousness involves, he clearly described the unrighteous character of those who refused to acknowledge God as creator. He highlighted the preponderance of unnatural relations among their women and among their men; men being consumed with passion towards other men and committing shameless acts among themselves. He also identified other forms of unrighteousness such as covetousness, malice, envy, murder, strife, deceit, and maliciousness. His list of unrighteous people also includes gossips, slanderers, haters of God, the insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, those who are disobedient to their parents; the foolish, faithless, heartless and the ruthless.

The interesting thing about Paul’s long list of unrighteous practices is that it does not just include the so called ‘big sins’ or obvious sins such as murder, sexual immorality, heartlessness and brutality; but it also includes such “small sins” or hidden sins like malice, envy, and jealousy, as well as foolishness and faithlessness. The fact that all acts of unrighteousness, whether big or small, overt or covert, attract God’s death decree raises the age-long question, “who then shall be saved?” And the answer is simple. Left on our own, none of us will be saved because at one point or another, all of us are guilty of at least one of the unrighteous practices on Paul’s list. That is why the gift of grace is so precious to us. Grace has freed us from the condemnation of sin and exchanged our reward of death with a gift of eternal life.

Having received the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ, the question now is, how should we respond to God’s grace and how should we treat fellow human beings who may be living in sin? Romans chapter two gives us the answer. In Romans Chapter two, Paul further emphasizes God’s judgement against all unrighteous practices but at the same time, he teaches us how to live in response to God’s grace. Let us read Romans 2: 1-11 and see what we can learn.

Romans 2:1-11

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. 2 We know that the **judgment** of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. 3 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? 4 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? 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. 6 He will render to each one according to his works: 7 to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; 8 but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. 9 There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, 10 but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. 11 For God shows no partiality.

Reflections

The crust of Paul's message to the Romans and to us is that God's righteous judgement is universal and impartial. All of us, whether we are Jews or Greek, believers or unbelievers, rich or poor, must stand before the judgement seat of God. Another key point in Paul's message is that God's gift of grace and His goodness towards us, does not diminish the requirements of His law. Nor can His grace be used as an excuse for sin. It is presumption on our part to think that God's grace frees us to practice the same unrighteous acts that put Jesus Christ on the cross. On the contrary, we should see God's grace as an invitation to sin no more. Our response to grace should be loving obedience to all of God's revealed will. The right response to grace also frees us from the temptation to judge others. The true knowledge of what God has done for us humbles us. And because we know that all of us will be judged according to our deeds, our attention will shift away from other people's weaknesses to our own sense of unworthiness. We will focus on examining our own hearts and making sure that we are not taking God's grace for granted. By realizing that we have the same sinful propensities as the people around us, we will no longer be inclined to judge and condemn them.

Paul's message to the Romans was not new. He was simply reechoing the words of Jesus in Mathew chapter 7: 1-2. Jesus says "Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you." Both Paul and Jesus Christ emphasize the fact that God alone is the righteous judge, and that all of us, no matter our caste or profession, are brothers and sisters who share the inheritance of sin. Our calling is to love, be compassionate and help our brothers and sisters in their struggle against sin and not to judge them.