

BIBLE & BAGEL

Romans – Our Common Faith

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Some commentators on the book of Romans that I have read say that there was no problem that Paul was addressing in the church in Rome. When I teach on this book I often say that I do not believe that Paul was sitting on Ben Yehudah Street in Jerusalem one day having his coffee and shawarma and suddenly decided to write to the believers in Rome to give them some foundational teaching. As we begin chapter two we see already one of the situations that he was addressing in the church. At the end of chapter 1 the Apostle addressed the issue of the sinful nature of mankind and how their rejection of God led to idolatry and perversion, now he begins to address sin in the church.

Romans 2:1-11

Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. 2 But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. 3 And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? 4 Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? 5 But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, 6 who "will render to each one according to his deeds": 7 eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; 8 but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness — indignation and wrath, 9 tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; 10 but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 11 For there is no partiality with God. NKJV*

He addresses the church not unbelievers, both Jew and Gentile, and the judgmental attitude of people in the church. He says that the people in the church judge others and condemn them for their sin, most likely speaking of their attitude towards those outside the church. He reminds them that they are sinners themselves they are not guiltless as well. This is the same attitude that Jesus addressed when he was confronted by the Pharisees with the woman caught in adultery, they wanted Him to give the order to stone her, instead He said whoever was without sin should throw the first stone¹.

Christians easily get sucked in by the Pharasaic spirit, we easily become proud and think we are better than others, we see the sin of other people as very great and we forget we ourselves are sinners saved by the grace of God, this is especially true in the church. In Singapore we recently had a case where a pastor of a mega church was convicted of a crime. It saddened me to see the comments on social media made by the non-Christians but it made me even sadder reading the comments of some Christians which were in some cases worse than those made by non-Christians.



We are reminded that God is the only one who can judge righteously, not us and by we too will be judged by the same righteous judge and the standards that we use to judge and condemn others we too will be judgedⁱⁱ. By being judgmental we are taking on a role that was only meant for God, in other words we try to become God. By condemning people we invalidate the grace and mercy of God. When we are hard-hearted in condemning others we are storing up wrath for ourselves on the Day of Judgment. God will repay everyone for the deeds they have done, those who do good will receive their rewards; Jews first and then non-Jews and those who do evil will receive punishment from God; both Jew and Gentile, no one gets special treatment.

Twice in this passage Paul uses the phrase Jew and Gentile; this is a strong indication that the problem in the church was not about judging those outside committing idolatry and all kinds of perversion, but rather the problem was in the church between the two parties, both parties judging each other and condemning each other. The purpose of Paul writing this letter therefore was to get the two parties to reconcile.

Having been a pastor for twenty years I have seen my fair share of squabbles within the church and one thing I have noticed is that when one party is offended they will share with others and the offence spreads like a virus. So when two people hurt each other they will both spread the offence and soon there will be two rival groups within the church fighting each other and condemning each other and both sides want the pastor to act as judge and punish the other party. This attitude brings nothing but pain and grief to the rest of the body, even if someone has fallen into sin the role of the church and its leaders is not to condemn but to reconcile and restore.

This does not mean we should not judge anything; the Bible is clear that we should test prophecies and teachingsⁱⁱⁱ, we judge the prophecy and teaching but not the prophet or teacher. If they are found to be false we do not listen to them any longer and we should warn others as well but we should never condemn and say this person is going to hell. Let the Lord deal with them

As the body of Christ let us live at peace with each other.

ⁱ John 8:1-12

ⁱⁱ Matthew 7:1-5

ⁱⁱⁱ 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21, 1 John 4:1

