

The most important thing in life to know... is that Jesus is able to save you from sin. ... (Can I get an “*Amen!*”?)

The second most important thing in life to know... is... (now before I say it... I really want you to stop and think before you “*Amen!*” it.) ... The second most important thing... is to know that you require it.

Jesus said:

**Luke 5:32 (ESV)**

*I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”*

In recent weeks... I will admit... I have been captivated by the news reports of what is happening in our world. ... And I am bothered... (no!... that isn't quite the word)... It makes me very angry to see mobs smashing store fronts... tearing down statues... and demanding that we abolish all police departments. ... When I see protestors in the face of police officers... mocking and taunting them with insults... daring officers to take (what I think would be rightful action) ... my heart begins to race... and my blood begins to boil. ... Insults about the foolish character of someone (audacious enough) to engage in such behavior... floods my heart and mind.

I will not ask for a show of hands... but if you are at all like me... then our passage of Scripture is very timely and targeted for us!

We ignore the fact... that if you and I are left to our human inclinations... we would very well be guilty of committing the same indiscretions that we condemn. ... The most important thing in life is to know that Jesus is able to save you from sin. ... The second most important thing is to know that you require it.

If you're like most people (including me) you have in your unconscious mind at least three moral categories... into which you place people. Some are without question undeniably "**bad**." Adolf Hitler. Joseph Stalin. Charles Manson. Judas Iscariot. Nero. Nearly everyone would agree, I think. These people were clearly evil.

Then there are a few undeniably "**good**" people... like the late Mother Teresa. She's often held up as the modern standard of "good." Another would be Billy Graham. Someone might say, "*Well, I'm no Mother Teresa or Billy Graham, but I'm a pretty decent person.*"

Then there's a broad middle category... containing the masses of somewhat-good-yet-sometimes-bad ... and other... yet-to-be-determined people. ... That's where we usually place ourselves, isn't it? ... And... within that category... we mentally rank people in order of observable goodness. ... Some are better than others (clearly.) Now... what do we use as our standard of measurement...? ... Perhaps a better way of asking that is - who do you suppose is the measuring rod? (Be honest!) ... It is ourselves... isn't it...?

(Hey... LISTEN!)... we will tolerate only as much evil in the world as we can accept **within ourselves**.

When driving on the freeway... the people who go slower than we do... are "jerks" and "idiots"... and whoever drives faster than we do... is clearly "a menace to everyone's safety!" ... Alcoholics often look down on "dope-heads"... while drug addicts ridicule "drunks." ... Even in prison... murderers... rapists... and thieves have no tolerance for child molesters...

and have no compunction about mistreating or even killing them. (Boy! There is such honor in prison! ... Isn't there?) ... We will tolerate only as much evil in the world as we can accept *within ourselves*.

We are about to read a verse in our passage today that says: "*the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice [evil]*" – and your inner response might be "*Amen!*" ... But this comes as Paul reminds us that the same judgment we call down upon others... falls upon us as well.

That's the part that will make us squirm. ... We all want justice for the world... but we each carry (within ourselves) a standard of righteousness based on our own perceived goodness. (And... you see... God has a problem with this.) ... It is called being "*self-righteous!*"

Today our passage is a rebuke against "self-righteousness."

A self-righteous person is someone who believes they are more acceptable to God... than someone else. The most important thing in life is to know that Jesus is able to save you from sin. ... The second most important thing is to know that we (ourselves) require it.

If there was ever an illustration of self-righteousness for us to see... it is in the parable of the Prodigal Son (which I read last week.) ... It fit the passage that we were studying last week... as it illustrated how God lets us go... when we reject Him... just as the Father in that parable allowed his son to take his inheritance and spend it on loose living in a far country. He ended up in misery.

Our passage today relates very strong to the second half of that parable. When the son returned home... the father was overjoyed and threw a big welcome home party. But the older brother (who stayed home and worked hard for the father)... was not so happy. He was self-righteous. ... He was so angry that the repentant younger son had been received back fully forgiven into the family... he refused to have any part in the celebrations. ... When the father came out to urge him to participate... the older brother made a speech... a speech simply oozing with self-righteousness.

**Luke 15:29-30 (ESV)**

*<sup>29</sup> but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. <sup>30</sup> But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!'*

Notice the "I" ... the "me" ... and the "my" ... in that speech. ... Notice also how he refused to be identified as the penitent prodigal's brother "*this son of yours*"... he said. ... The younger son was guilty of sins of the flesh... but the older brother... with his pride... stubbornness... bitterness and hypocrisy... was guilty of sins of the heart... sins of the spirit. He was just as much a rebel against the father as the younger brother... and much harder to win.

The self-righteous person feels that other people's sins are worse than his/her own. Passing judgment upon others is ultimately a distraction ploy. We seek to validate ourselves by averting the attention off of ourselves and onto another. "*Look at him! His life is a wreck,*" or, "*I cant believe she did that. How could anyone do that?*"

We compare ourselves to the drunkard... the sex-addict... and the foul-mouthed person... while priding ourselves on our own church membership... morality... and respectability. .. Perhaps... we believe that the Heavenly Father is somehow swayed by our poker faces. ... But He is not. ...Our rather selective comparison is... of course... very flattering to ourselves. ... The mistake we make... however... is that we are measuring ourselves alongside the wrong standard. Today's passage is all about the right standard – God's!

As we study it today... here is what I hope it will do for us. I pray that it will give us a perspective that makes us more patient with the sins and failings of others. ... Do you have a problem being tolerant... or patient with others. Are you at all “self-righteous”...? A fresh look at our own dependence on the grace of God is what is needed. ... If you and I are left to our human inclinations... we would very well be guilty of committing the same indiscretions that we condemn.

The most important thing in life is to know that Jesus is able to save you from sin. ... The second most important thing is to know that we (ourselves) require it.

There is nothing more destructive to the spread of the Gospel than our loosing sight of this. ... It is a fact that if you have a censorious... self-righteous spirit... others will sense it without your saying a word. The set of your jaw... the moisture in your eye... the flush of your countenance... the tone of your voice will give you away — and you will bring... not life... but death to others!

Although I am very grateful for the Bible-teaching church that I grew-up in... it had a Gospel-killing problem of self-righteousness. My mother was never accepted. She had been divorced before she married my dad... and in the 1960's our little Baptist Church could not accept her. I witnessed every Sunday as the church filed out the door and the Pastor stood there to shake hands with everyone... he would never shake my mom's hand... He would not even look at her.

For years I would see this... and sometimes hear my mother cry... about not being accepted. My dad would never attend church. He saw it as full of self-righteous hypocrites. (There is probably nothing more destructive to the spread of the Gospel than this.)

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Let's now go to our passage and see how the Apostle Paul puts down the principles by which God will judge all "judging sinners"...

### **Romans 2:1-5**

Paul is referring to the long list of sins that was part of the passage we studied last week. Paul catalogued about 21 sins. And here... in the verses that I just read... Paul is exposing the Jews' false presumption of superiority over the Gentiles. The church at Rome was a mixture of both Jewish and Gentile believers... trying to get along.

By the time Paul gets around to writing this letter to the church at Rome... he has been preaching the gospel for at least twenty-two years. ... He knows exactly how people will respond to the various points he makes.

How often must Paul have condemned the Gentiles for their sin only to note Jews in the audience joining in with his criticism and priding themselves on being far superior to them. ... We can almost see Paul at the beginning of chapter 2 fixing his gaze on these self-satisfied Jews and blasting them in the same way he has condemned the Gentiles.

Certainly the Jews would applaud Paul's condemnation of the Gentiles in Romans 1:18-32. "*Let them have it Paul... Yes! Yes! They are to be condemned for these things!*" ... Jewish national and religious pride encouraged them to despise the "Gentile dogs" and have nothing to do with them. ... And even though the Jews were also doing the very things they thought that Paul was rightly condemning the Gentiles for... they thought that they were exempt.

The Jews thought that they were free from judgment because they were God's chosen people. ... But Paul affirmed that God's election of the Jews made their responsibility and accountability even greater.... They have no justification for believing that they are more acceptable to God.

The apostle shows them that *crime is crime...* wherever committed; that sin does not lose its essential character by being committed in the midst of religious privileges... and that those who professed to be the people of God have no peculiar license to sin. ... Religious people in all ages... like the Jews... have supposed that they... being the friends of God... have a right

to do many things... which would not be proper in others... that what *would be* sin in others... *they* may commit with impunity... and that God will not be strict to mark the offences of His people. ... Against all this Paul writes. The Bible uniformly teaches that the worst sins among men... are those committed by the professed people of God.

### **Romans 2:4**

Paul was concerned that these Jews... overconfident in their special status with God... and unwilling to repent of sin... were showing contempt for God's blessings. ... So Paul reminds them that God's kindness is meant to lead them to repentance... because all people need to repent... and receive God's grace!

### **2 Peter 3:9 (ESV)**

*The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.*

God is kind in giving us life and its fullness to enjoy. He is tolerant and patient... as He bears our ingratitude and sin. ... He postpones punishment... in order to give people time to turn from their sin. Unfortunately... we are more likely to be amazed at God's patience with others... than we are to be humbled at His patience with us. ... It is easy to mistake God's patience ... for approval of our self-righteous living.

Here is what the self-righteous forgets... ..

The judgment of God (when it finally comes)... will be righteous judgment. He will weigh every thought and word and deed. ... The sins of omission as well as the sins of commission will be considered. ... God will render to



every man according to his deeds. ... God's judgment is based upon the truth of what a person's thoughts and motives are... of what is really within a person's mind and heart. ... Thus... when the self-righteous person sets out to judge others... he puts himself on very thin ice indeed. ... He forgets how bad his own sin is... and that he deserves God's rejection as well.

The most important thing in life is to know that Jesus is able to save you from sin. ... The second most important thing is to know that we (ourselves) require it.

Now... before we read the next paragraph of Paul's letter to the Romans... let me try to head-off any wrong understanding. ... This is one of the most difficult sections in Romans... because... on the surface... it seems to teach that salvation is by works... that eternal life can be earned by patient continuing in well-doing. ... Such an idea... however... is foreign to the whole tenor of Scripture. (And in fact... Paul will deny it in this very letter.)

As we read these next verses... lets bear in mind that this passage has to do with God's basis of *judgment*. God's judgement is that we **all** deserve Hell... because works will only save us – **if we are perfect**... and no one but Christ is. All of us... including the most judgmental among us deserves Hell. ... Remember: Paul is not discussing how a person is saved and receives eternal life. That comes later. Here he is showing that Jew and Gentile are on the same ground before God in the matter of sin. ... He is addressing the ridiculous position of self-righteous thinking.

### **Romans 2:6-11**

Each person will be **judged** by his or her deeds... but **not saved** by them. At the end of days... everyone who is relying on their works... will lay his or her deeds on the scale and they will be found wanting.

(LISTEN!) Anyone who wants to work for eternal life may do so. ... They will be judged according to their deeds... (in other words... they will be shown that they deserve Hell by their failure to meet the standard of works.) ... Each person will be **judged** by his or her deeds... but **not saved** by them. We are warned in Revelation that everyone will fail this test.

**Revelation 20:12 (ESV)**

*And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.*

**Revelation 20:15 (ESV)**

*And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*

Trusting Christ as Savior puts your name in the "book of life." Eternal life is not a reward for effort. It is a gift to those who trust Christ. ... This is what makes self-righteousness so wrong!

Oh! self-righteous one... you are saved **only** because God gave it to you as a gift. You are **not** superior to anyone. ... If you and I are left to our human inclinations... we would very well be guilty of committing the **same indiscretions** that we condemn.

The most important thing in life is to know that Jesus is able to save you from sin. ... The second most important thing is to know that we (ourselves) require it.

Paul's discussion with the Jews in Rome... has been destroying their reason for being self-righteous... It is not enough to simply **have** the Law. It must be **obeyed**. In fact it must be **perfectly** obeyed. (And no one will.)

At this point... perhaps... Paul could anticipate what these Jewish believers were thinking. "According to what you say... Paul... only Jews can be judged... because we have the Law and know what God requires. Gentiles do not know how to obey God. If we are the only ones who God can judge... then having the Law... really isn't a privilege at all... !" So Paul answers this possible objection before it can start.

### **Romans 2:12-16**

Gentiles will be judged on the basis of the knowledge available to them. They won't be condemned for failing to conform to a code of laws they knew nothing about. They will not perish because they didn't have the Jewish law; they will perish because they have sinned. ... People are condemned not for what they don't know... but for what they do with what they know. They will be judged guilty because they did not keep even the standards of their own conscience.

What the law does for the Jew... the conscience does for the Gentile... acting as God's law written within them.

Sociologists have found that every culture and every nation that has been known to man... no matter how different... have a common recognition that

some behaviors are right... and others behaviors are wrong. (In other words... human conscious universally exists... except in the rare individual who has a psychological disorder.)

Gentiles who do not know God's law have a moral sensitivity in their hearts that matches what God's law requires. A conscience is an inward monitor that lets us know when we have done wrong. It bears witness to the fact that man lives in a moral universe and God has a right to judge all men.

A characteristic of God's judgment is that it will expose the secrets of every person. One day the secrets of every self-righteous person will all be exposed... and he/she will be shown for what they really are.

The only way to truly judge a person is to judge his or her secret life. Some actions that appear good may be wrongly motivated. ... Other (less visible actions)... may be done with good intentions. ... In this manner... both Jews and Gentiles will be judged. ... In the end... God will judge. Nothing will have to be explained to God. His judgment will be perfect... based on his perfect knowledge of every action and every motive.

Is the point of this message that only God can judge...? Should we never see any fault - at all - in a brother or sister in Christ...?

No... The Lord wants us to care about right and wrong. He wants us to be agents of good and to stand against evil. And the best place to start is not far from where you sit right now. Self-examination is the place to begin.

We must be keenly aware of our own motives. ... Have we adopted an attitude of self-righteousness that cares nothing for the soul of another? ...

Do we name the sins of another and then (like modern-day Pharisees) show no mercy? ... Have we cultivated a superior attitude that condemns others for the sake of selfish gain? ... Are we in fact diverting attention away from our own guilt by pointing an accusing finger at the wrongdoing of another?

The answers to these questions are critically important. Jesus warned,

**Matthew 7:2-5 (ESV)**

*<sup>2</sup> For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. <sup>3</sup> Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? <sup>4</sup> Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? <sup>5</sup> You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.*

This brings us back to Paul's purpose for stating, "*in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself*" (Rom. 2:1). If we call the sin of another into account... we must do so with a humble attitude in a spirit of grace.

The most important thing in life is to know that Jesus is able to save you from sin. ... The second most important thing is to know that we (ourselves) require it.

We are not to go around criticizing and finding fault with each other and putting each other down when one of us fails. Instead we are to reach out and try to redeem and help each other. Imagine what a different world this would be if all criticism and fault-finding ceased among every believer! If everyone actually reached out and tried to redeem and save those who

failed! ... In these ways the sickness and impotence of the Church is perpetuated.

Let's hypocrite-proof our church! ... It begins with a soul-search of ourselves. "*Am I self-righteous...?*"