

“Each One According to His Works”

Psalm 62:11-12; Romans 2:1-11

By Rev. Nollie Malabuyo • July 18, 2021 (BSCC)

Dear Congregation of Christ: Almost two years ago, Marty Sampson, a well-known music writer, singer, and worship leader of megachurch Hillsong, “I’m genuinely losing my faith.. and it doesn’t bother me... Why is the Bible full of contradictions? No one talks about it. How can God be love yet send 4 billion people to a place, all coz they don’t believe? No one talks about it. Christians can be the most judgmental people on the planet - they can also be some of the most beautiful and loving people... but it's not for me.”

Why is the Bible full of contradictions? How can a loving God send people to hell? Why are Christians so judgmental? These are some of the most common complaints and arguments against the Bible, Christianity, and Christians. So, today, we will consider two of these questions: Why does God send people to hell? Why are Christians so judgmental?

Last Sunday, we finished Romans Chapter 1 where the Apostle Paul declares that all mankind knows that there is a Creator God because of all the creation he sees around him. However, because of their ungodliness and unrighteousness, unbelievers reject in their minds and hearts this knowledge of truth. Instead, they exchanged this truth for the lie that there is no God. For this reason, God has revealed his wrath against them.

Paul then says three times in Chapter 1 that God “gave them up” to their ungodly and unrighteous passions. What this means is that God withholds the restraining power of the Holy Spirit over their lives, so he hands them over to their total depravity. Paul then gives an example of the outcome of this unbelief, an example that is most unpopular in our culture today: women having unnatural sexual relations with women, and men having unnatural sexual relations with men. And not only do they practice these ungodly acts; they also promote them and even force others to do the same.

In this first chapter, Paul condemns those Gentiles—non-Jews—who do not believe in Christ. And we can imagine a Jew reading this chapter nodding their heads, saying in their minds, “Yes, God condemns Gentiles, but not me. I’m a Jew, a circumcised child of Abraham, a member of God’s chosen nation, a follower of the laws of Moses, and a regular worshiper in the temple.” But then he starts reading Chapter 2, where he encounters, *“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.”* Who is Paul referring to when he says, “O man”? He is referring to him, a Jew, who do the same ungodly things that Gentiles do. So, Paul later says that everyone—whether Jew or Gentile—will be judged by God according to their works.

In this first verse, Paul deals with our two common questions about God sending unbelievers to hell and about Christians being judgmental. So, our meditation today is **“Each One According to His Works”** under two headings: first, **“To Everyone Who Does Evil”**; and second, **“To Everyone Who Does Good.”**

“To Everyone Who Does Evil”

Remember the last three verses of Romans Chapter 1 from last Lord’s Day? Paul lists all kinds of evil deeds that unbelieving Gentiles do: unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

Now in Chapter 2, Paul follows his condemnation of Gentiles with a rebuke of his fellow Jews. They judge Gentiles because of their ungodly works, but they themselves do the very same things. Who comes to mind in this rebuke? It is Jesus himself rebuking the Jews, particularly the scribes and the Pharisees, of their hypocrisy. In Mark 7:9-13, Jesus condemns the Pharisees who have a tradition which allowed them to give offerings to the temple even to the neglect of their elderly parents. In Matthew 23:34, our Lord again condemns the Pharisees for building and decorating the tombs of the prophets, while they and their ancestors killed the prophets. Jesus also prophesied that he and his apostles and prophets would be persecuted and killed by these same Jews (Matt 23:34).

If Jesus judged the scribes and the Pharisees for their evil deeds, why then does he rebuke them for judging others in verse 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?”* Because they do not do what they teach, the mark of hypocrites. This is why he taught in the Sermon on the Mount, *“Judge not, that you be not judged”* (Matt 7:1). To drive his point home, he gives an overstatement, not a literal command, *“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.”* If we believe that we are better than others, then hypocrisy takes over. And we often do not see our own faults and sins because of pride. So, we only see others’ faults and sins. This is one of the reasons why musician Marty Sampson rejected the Christian faith. He concluded what all unbelievers also say, “The church is full of hypocrites.”

Is this really true? The true Christian in the church who professes to be a saint in Christ and acknowledges his sins is a totally different matter from a hypocrite. Though he continues to commit sins, he repents and turns back to God stronger in the faith because of his repentance. How can he be a hypocrite when he admits being a sinner that he is, according to the Word of God? Unbelievers and professing believers who do not attend church—and there are many—see churchgoing Christians sin, and then conclude that the church is full of hypocrites. Far from the truth!

There is no church that has 100 percent true Christians. All throughout Biblical history, there has never been a perfect church. The church will always have false professors—hypocrites—among true believers. And true believers will continue to sin until Christ returns to make the church perfect. Article 29 of the Belgic Confession describes Christians as saints, and at the same time, sinners. This is seen in all Scriptures where we see “heroes of the faith” continue to fail and sin, even as they are faithful believers, like Abraham, Moses, David, and the Apostles of Christ. We know this ourselves.

These saints-sinners are not hypocrites. It is the world outside the church that is full of hypocrites! In self-delusion, they present themselves before others and before God that they are

“basically good” people. In a recent Pew Research survey, 65 percent of all Americans agree that most people are basically good, disagreeing with God’s Word that condemns all mankind as worthless and wicked (Rom 3:10, 23). Is the church full of hypocrites? By no means! There may be a handful, but many of those who have made profession of faith or worship regularly are sinners who have been justified and declared righteous saints by our holy God by faith alone in Christ alone. And they show it in their public and private lives. *Therefore, “the church is full of hypocrites” is often merely an excuse for not attending and joining the church.*

However, are we to refrain from judging others in all cases? Paul is not prohibiting us from forming an opinion about someone or something. He is not saying that we should wink at or turn a blind eye toward other people’s sins or errors. In his earthly ministry, Jesus often called out the Pharisees and the scribes for their self-righteous errors. The apostles themselves often named names of those who were in the church, but who were false teachers and who were committing public sins.

So if Jesus and Paul are not prohibiting these kinds of judgments, what then are they prohibiting? First, we may not judge too harshly or too rashly. In many cases, sins and errors have extenuating circumstances. Often, we judge based on second or third hand information, so we don’t even know the facts. We also often judge based on our preconceived opinion—usually negative—of the person. At times, our judgment is born out of a disagreement with or a grudge against the person. Other times, we judge harshly or rashly because of a selfish desire to hurt or get even.

Second, Paul warns us against judging based on our own opinion or standard. Our standard must be the truth, according to verse 8. And what is the truth? It is all of Scriptures. When Jesus speaks, he always speaks the truth because he is God, and God is truth. Scriptures is perfect, inerrant, and infallible because God is perfect. The Pharisees made their own laws based on their own preferences or opinions or traditions, so they were condemned by Jesus at every turn. What should be our standard? It must only be God’s holy and authoritative Word, nothing else. So, if we Christians condemn abortion, it is based on the Biblical command not to murder. If we condemn LGBTQ+, it is based on the Biblical command not to commit sexual immorality and not to have “unnatural” sexual relations. If we condemn Socialism and Communism, it is based on the Biblical command not to steal what is not ours. If we condemn racism, it is based on the Biblical truth that God’s chosen nation is made up of believers from all nations, tribes, and languages of the world.

What about the judgment that will befall unbelievers who think they are “basically good”? This judgment will be God’s eternal wrath and fury. Every unbeliever who does evil will suffer tribulation and distress in eternal punishment. They presume that God is so loving, gracious, merciful, kind and patient, and that he will not send anyone to hell. But they are grossly mistaken in their presumption, for the Scriptures is full of warnings about the torments of eternal hell. God’s kindness and patience towards them are meant to lead them to repentance and faith.

This is why Jesus began his preaching with these urgent words, *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel”* (Mark 1:15). Therefore, the writer of Hebrews says,

“And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment” (Heb 9:27). After this life is over, there are no second chances, whether you are a Jew or a Gentile (Rom 2:9).

“To Everyone Who Does Good”

Our Lord Jesus Christ, together with Paul and all his Apostles, have a sober warning against all who do evil. It is a matter of eternal life in heaven or eternal torment in hell. What about “everyone who does good”? Paul says, *“to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life”* (2:7). We must be patient and persevering through our life of pain, sufferings, and persecutions.

Just as Jesus and all his Apostles were persecuted, all Christians will be persecuted. And those who persevere to the end will receive glory, honor, peace and immortality, that is, eternal life in our indescribable heavenly dwelling-places. This is what Jesus promises us in Matthew 5:10–12, *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

Paul says that God *“will render to each one according to his works.”* To those who do evil works, he will pour out his righteous wrath. To those who do good works, he will reward with his eternal blessings in heaven. But does this contradict his teaching that our good works, our obedience to God’s commandments, can never be the basis of our salvation? Did he not say in Ephesians 2:8-9, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast”*? And in Romans 3:20, he also says, *“For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight.”*

What then can we make of this? Paul cannot contradict himself, for his letters are inspired by God the Holy Spirit, and God is perfect. Therefore, we must harmonize whatever we read in Scriptures. In all of the New Testament, we read that good works *follow* salvation, not the *ground* of salvation. For even Isaiah says that our good works are as unclean “filthy garments” in the sight of God (Isa 64:6). Jesus equates believers to a good tree that bears much good fruits (Matt 12:33). Paul says that our good works are all fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-24).

Therefore, no matter how much good works we do, we cannot be saved from God’s wrath by doing them. Why? Because all human beings are born with a sinful nature, so no one can ever be perfect and sinless. And one sin in word, deed or thought condemns us to eternal hell. Adam and Eve found this out the hard way and too late. In Romans 5:12-21, Adam and all his descendants are condemned to death because he violated God’s one command in the Garden of Eden. All human beings are then born sinners because of Adam’s one act of disobedience.

But dear friends, Paul says in Romans 7:24–25, *“Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”* And the answer is, *“Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”* Our Lord Jesus Christ is the only man ever to have lived a perfectly righteous, sinless life

(Heb 4:15; 9:28). And he offered his perfect body and blood as a sacrifice for all the sins of all his people, and that includes you who believe and trust in him. God blesses you with glory, honor and eternal life only through faith in Christ alone. Because when you do, your sins are forgiven, and God transfers all your sins to his Son on the cross and counts Christ's perfect sinless life as yours. Therefore, by faith and repentance, God moves you from the condemnation of eternal hell to the blessing of eternal life.

Dear Christian, you have this assurance! God's Word never fails. His promises are righteous and trustworthy. But be warned, you who do not believe, and you who pretend to believe, God's Word is true for you as well. His dire and deadly warning against you will be fulfilled on Judgment Day. Therefore, repent and believe, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!