

PRESUMPTION

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Unashamed - A Study of Romans / Romans 2:1–11

We are quick to condemn the sins of others while ignoring the same guilt in ourselves. God's patience is not approval, but an invitation to repent before judgment comes. No one stands above the standard, and no one sits beside the Judge.

Introduction

- Several years ago, I found myself the “blessed” recipient of a jury summons.
 - The dreaded day arrived and I went to the courthouse, fully expecting to get dismissed - Baptist preachers aren't ideal jurors because we tend to see morality in very limited shades of grey.
 - But somehow I got seated on a jury for a criminal trial.
 - Now instead of grabbing lunch and getting back to work, I had to come back AFTER lunch.
 - And somehow, through a series of unfortunate decisions by the legal system, I ended up as the jury foreman.
- So now, I'm clearly committed, I found myself kind of hoping for an interesting case, but not so interesting that it would take days upon days to reach a verdict.
 - So we find out our case.
 - Not a murder trial. Not some kind of high-profile white-collar crime.
 - No, I was the foreman for a jury in a speeding ticket trial.
 - I didn't even know you could have a jury trial for a speeding ticket... but turns out you can request one.
- So here we are, sitting in this jury box, watching this disaster unfold.
 - The assistant DA treated it like a real trial.

- And the defendant - well he also chose to represent himself.
- I'm pretty sure he got his lawyering skills by watching reruns of Law & Order.
- So he would object, the judge would overrule him.
- And it went on and on and on.
- And on and on and on.
- The officer who issued the citation testified and the defendant got to cross-examine him.
 - He accused him of entrapment, of having an illegally calibrated radar gun.
 - Of course, with no evidence for any of these things.
 - And the jury is sitting here growing more and more agitated at the ridiculous waste of resources.
 - I don't remember exactly, but the guy's speeding ticket was less than \$250.
 - All I could think, I could be doing something productive, but instead, I'm stuck in this courtroom listening to this guy try to Perry-Mason himself out of a \$250 traffic ticket.
 - At some point in the afternoon, it became really clear that the speeding ticket wasn't on trial anymore.
 - Time. Time itself was on trial. and it was losing.
- By the time we got sent to the jury room to deliberate, the mood had shifted considerably.
 - Nobody was talking about the speed limit or the radar used in the traffic stop.
 - Evidence didn't matter.
 - We deliberated for less than five minutes.

- We were so frustrated, we were ready to convict him of things that hadn't even happened.
- If there had been a murder charge available, somebody probably would have suggested it.
- Exactly how long CAN he go to prison for a \$250 speeding ticket?
- The amazing thing was how quickly six ordinary citizens became judges.
 - Not like the judge that presided over our speeding ticket case, but moral judges.
 - We had moved beyond the evidence.
 - We had formed conclusions about the man himself.
 - His character.
 - His motives.
 - His intelligence.
 - His choices.
 - And the remarkable thing is that none of us knew him.
 - And we felt remarkably qualified to do it.
- [Romans 1](#) ends with a long list of sins.
 - And if we're honest, most of us read it exactly like that jury listened to the speeding ticket case.
 - We identify the guilty.
 - We evaluate the evidence.
 - We form our conclusions.
 - We know exactly what should happen to "those people."
- Then [Romans 2](#) begins with one of the most uncomfortable words in the entire letter:
 - "Therefore..."

- It turns out that all of us who were ready to throw the book at the speeder that day were also prone to speeding and rolling stop signs and maybe glancing at our cell phones and failing to use our turn signals and a whole host of other traffic rule violations.
- That's the challenge that Paul brings to us today, but the crimes aren't simple traffic violations - they're far more consequential.
 - Paul turns from the defendant's table and points directly at the jury box.
 - Suddenly the people evaluating the evidence discover they are the ones on trial!
- But that's what presumption does, it always whispers the same lie:
 - "The rules apply, but not to me."
 - "The warning is real, but not for me."
 - "The judgment is coming, but not for me."
 - As we open to chapter 2 this morning, we'll see how the Apostle dismantles all those lies, one piece at a time.

Scripture Reading

[Romans 2:1–11](#) (ESV)

¹ 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.

- There's a story in [2 Samuel 11](#) that you're probably familiar with.
 - King David's moral life came off the rails through an adulterous relationship, attempted coverup, and conspiracy to commit murder.
 - It was a bad situation that kept spiraling out of control.
 - One day after the dust of the situation had kind of settled, a prophet named Nathan came to confront the King.
 - And he told him a story about a wealthy man who took a poor man's lamb because he was unwilling to use what belonged to him.
 - As Nathan told the story, David's sense of justice kicked in and he was ready for that wealthy man to pay the price for his sin.
 - David was furious.

- He wanted justice.
 - He wanted accountability.
 - He wanted judgment.
 - Then Nathan looked him in the eye and uttered four devastating words: “You are the man.”
- That is precisely the argument that Paul is making as we transition from chapter 1 to chapter 2.
- We’ve all read chapter 1 and perhaps nodded along as Paul diagnosed the problem with culture.
 - And it is really easy to nod our heads and say, “You know what, *THEY* are the problem.”
 - It is those sinners out *THERE* who are making life so bad for the rest of us.
 - But just like David walked into the trap of Nathan's parable, Paul has spent all of [Romans 1](#) setting a trap for the self-righteous reader.
 - And it springs shut in chapter 2.
 - We have judged those sinners outside and have found them to be wanting in righteousness.
 - We've examined the evidence.
 - We've identified the guilty.
 - We've rendered our verdict.
 - Then Paul turns and says:
 - "Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges..."
 - Suddenly the people pointing the finger discover the finger is pointing back at them.

- The people rendering the verdict discover they stand under the same verdict.
- And the people acting as judge discover that...

The Judge is Guilty (vv. 1-3)

- The guilty judge here isn't God — it's the self-righteous person who has made a career of identifying everyone else's sin while remaining remarkably blind to his own.
 - This is the one Jesus described as worrying about the speck in the eyes of others without dealing with the log protruding from his own eye.
 - Paul isn't creating categories of sinners where one group is more guilty than another.
 - He's leveling the playing field.
 - The homosexual from chapter 1.
 - The self-righteous moralist from chapter 2.
 - The pagan.
 - The religious.
 - The rebel.
 - The church member.
 - They all share something in common:
 - They are all without excuse.
- But notice Paul's argument carefully.
 - He doesn't simply say that the self-righteous person sins.
 - Everybody knows that.
 - Paul says that the self-righteous person condemns himself by the very act of judging others.

- Why?
 - Because every time we identify sin in someone else's life, we demonstrate that we know the difference between right and wrong.
 - Every time we condemn dishonesty, lust, pride, greed, selfishness, or rebellion in another person, we are acknowledging God's standard.
- Now, let's be careful here.
 - Paul isn't saying that Christians should stop calling sin what it is.
 - In fact, Paul has spent all of [Romans 1](#) doing exactly that.
 - As a pastor, part of my responsibility is to stand in this pulpit and explain what God says is right and what God says is wrong.
 - The issue isn't recognizing sin.
 - The issue isn't speaking truth.
 - The issue is assuming that because I can identify sin, I must somehow be exempt from it.
 - The issue is assuming that my ability to diagnose the disease means I'm immune to the disease.
 - Biblical conviction says, "That is sinful."
 - Self-righteousness says, "That is sinful, and I would never do such a thing."
 - Paul is not condemning moral discernment.
 - Paul is condemning moral superiority.
- The problem is that we often apply that standard with great enthusiasm to others and remarkable patience to ourselves.
 - We become prosecuting attorneys for everyone else's failures and defense attorneys for our own.
 - When someone else sins, we explain it by their character.
 - When we sin, we explain it by our circumstances.

- When someone else falls short, they should have known better.
- When we fall short, we hope people will understand.
- And here is how we sustain that double standard.
 - We choose our measuring stick very carefully.
 - The self-righteous person almost never measures himself against a holy God.
 - That would be too uncomfortable. Too conclusive.
 - Instead he measures himself against the person in chapter 1.
 - The homosexual.
 - The murderer.
 - The God-hater.
 - And by that standard, he looks pretty good.
- He measures himself against the neighbor going through a messy divorce.
 - Against the coworker everybody knows has a drinking problem.
 - Against the family member who made a wreck of their life.
 - And the comparison always comes out the same way.
 - *At least I'm not that.*
- But here is what Paul will not allow.
 - The standard in this passage isn't your neighbor.
 - It isn't the person in chapter 1.
 - It isn't the worst person you can think of.
 - The standard is a holy God who shows no partiality.
- So here is a diagnostic question worth sitting with this week:

- Who do you compare yourself to when you want to feel good about where you stand with God?
- If the answer is another sinner — any other sinner — you have been using the wrong measuring stick.
- And the wrong measuring stick always produces the same result.
 - It tells you that you are doing fine when you are not.
 - It tells you that you are the exception when you are not.
 - It tells you that the standard doesn't apply to you when it does.
- Paul says that doesn't work.
- The standard we gladly apply to others is the same standard under which we ourselves stand.
 - And because we all stand beneath that standard, God is perfectly justified when He judges sin wherever He finds it.
 - The problem isn't that God judges too harshly.
 - Rather, our problem is that we assume His judgment stops with everyone else.
- Presumption is the assumption that I am the exception.
 - That God's standards apply to others more than they apply to me.
 - That God's warnings are meant for someone else.
 - That God's judgment will somehow pass me by.
 - Paul's message in verses 1-3 is simple:
 - You are not the exception.
- The presumptuous person looks around and notices something.
 - He has been living this way for years, maybe decades.
 - And the sky hasn't fallen. The ground hasn't opened up.
 - Life, by most measures, is going pretty well.

- And so presumption whispers another lie: "*See? God isn't concerned. If He were really bothered by this, something would have happened by now.*"
 - Paul anticipates exactly that objection in verse 4.
 - And his answer is both more gracious and more sobering than we expect.
 - The silence of God is not His approval.
 - The patience of God is not His indifference.

The Delay is Mercy (vv. 4-5)

- I must confess, on more than one occasion, I've used a portion of this passage in preaching and calling for response.
 - I've pleaded with the sinner to remember that God's kindness is meant to lead them to repentance.
 - God has delayed the inevitable because he wants to see sinners come to Jesus.
 - And while that application is certainly true, we need to remember who Paul is addressing here.
 - He's not primarily speaking to the pagan in the streets.
 - He's speaking to the moralist in the mirror.
 - He's speaking to the self-righteous person who has convinced himself that God's warnings are for someone else.
- So what is the appeal? That's the sad reality - the self-righteous, presumptuous person sitting in the church pew doesn't even realize what is happening.
- In a very real sense, there are two accounts that are running at the same time.
- The first account is described in verse 4.

- Every day God makes deposits into that account.
 - Kindness.
 - Forbearance.
 - Patience.
 - Kindness is God's positive disposition toward us.
 - Forbearance is the active withholding of what we deserve.
 - Patience is the sustained duration of that withholding.
 - Every day God credits kindness.
 - Every day God credits patience.
 - Every day God credits forbearance.
 - Every sunrise.
 - Every breath.
 - Every undeserved blessing.
 - Every moment judgment is delayed.
 - God keeps making deposits.
- But the self-righteous person misreads those deposits.
- Instead of seeing an invitation to repent, he sees confirmation that everything is fine.
 - He mistakes mercy for approval.
 - He mistakes patience for indifference.
 - He mistakes delay for exemption.
- At the very same time, however, another account is growing.
 - Verse 5 tells us that because of a hard and unrepentant heart, wrath is being stored up.
 - Think about that language.

- Stored up.
- Accumulated.
- Saved.
- This isn't a sudden crisis.
 - This is a slow, methodical, self-inflicted buildup.
 - Every day that God's kindness is ignored.
 - Every day that repentance is postponed.
 - Every day that mercy is presumed upon.
 - Another deposit is made.
- Not into an account filled with blessing, but into an account filled with judgment.
- One account is filled by God's kindness.
 - The other is filled by man's stubbornness.
 - And both balances are growing at the same time.
 - That hard and unrepentant heart is saving for a future it doesn't want.
- But therein lies the tragedy.
 - It is both a future it does not want and a future it does not believe is coming.
 - Because it has completely misread the delay.
 - The delay is not approval.
 - The delay is mercy.
- And if the self-righteous person continues to misread God's kindness, one day the delay will end.
 - The opportunity to repent will give way to the certainty of judgment.

- And the kindness that should have led him to repentance will stand as evidence that he refused it.
- Now at this point, presumption makes one final argument.
 - It has already whispered that the standard doesn't apply to me. It has already whispered that the delay means everything is fine.
 - And now it whispers its last lie: "*Maybe the verdict will never actually come.*"
 - Maybe God is too loving to follow through. Maybe grace means the books never really get settled. Maybe there's always another delay coming.
- Paul doesn't leave that door open.
 - Verses 6 through 11 are as unambiguous as anything in this letter.
 - The verdict is not pending. The verdict is not negotiable. The verdict is not avoidable.

The Verdict is Certain (vv. 6-11)

- We get to verse 6 and we're confronted with a stark reality... "He will render to each one according to his works..."
 - Hang on just a second. That doesn't sound right
 - Didn't Paul make the point back in the thesis of chapter 1, "The righteous shall live by faith"?
 - So why are we now swapping over to works?
 - That's because Paul isn't talking about works here as a *mechanism* of salvation.
 - Instead, he is pointing to works as *evidence* of salvation.
 - There are two biblical truths at work here.
 - We are saved by faith, not our works.
 - Our works function as confirmation of our faith.

- Both of those things can be true at the same time
 - The best works are always undermined by the absence of faith.
 - And any proclamation of faith is always deemed suspect in the absence of works.
- Once you understand that, there is no ambiguity in this passage.
 - The person who "by patience in well-doing seeks glory and honor and immortality" isn't earning eternal life through accumulated good behavior.
 - The seeking itself — the orientation of the life, the direction of the heart — is the fruit of genuine faith.
 - Likewise, the one who trusts in his own moral performance...he is the one who is self-seeking.
 - And that's the irony of all this - the person most confident in his own righteousness may be the clearest example of the self-seeking that Paul is warning about.
- And so Paul closes this section with one final statement that leaves no room for negotiation.
 - Verse 11: "*For God shows no partiality.*"
 - No partiality toward the Jew who assumed covenant membership was enough.
 - No partiality toward the Greek who assumed cultural distance was enough.
 - No partiality toward the moralist who assumed moral performance was enough.
- Every category presumption creates to exempt itself — God dismantles.
 - Remember the three lies presumption whispers:
 - *The standard doesn't apply to me.*
 - God shows no partiality.

- *The delay means everything is fine.*
 - God shows no partiality.
- *The verdict will never actually come.*
 - God shows no partiality.
- There is no exemption clause.
 - There is no special category.
 - There is no curve being graded on.
 - The same standard. The same Judge. The same verdict.
- For every human being who does evil — tribulation and distress.
- For everyone who does good — glory and honor and peace.
 - Jew first and also Greek. Without exception. Without partiality.
 - And that should stop every one of us cold.
- Because if God shows no partiality, then all of our excuses suddenly collapse.
 - The jury story at the beginning of this message worked because we were convinced we knew exactly who the guilty party was.
 - [Romans 2](#) reminds us that God's courtroom is different.
 - The question is not whether we can identify guilt in someone else.
 - The question is whether we can honestly acknowledge it in ourselves.
 - Because the verdict is certain.
 - The standard is fixed.
 - The Judge is righteous.
- And presumption has no defense to offer.
 - Because if God shows no partiality, then presumption is not merely dangerous.

- Presumption is deadly.
- But let us not forget the hopeful truth already present in this passage.
 - God is kind.
 - God is forbearing.
 - God is patient.
 - And that patience has a purpose.
- The delay that presumption has been misreading as indifference — it was actually an invitation.
 - It still is.
 - The same kindness that will one day stand as evidence against those who refused it — is today extended to those who will receive it.

Invitation

- So what are we to do with this text this morning?
 - There are no doubt people within earshot today whose lives are a mess.
 - You walked into this building today and you're kind of wondering why the roof didn't fall in on you.
 - You've made choices that you're ashamed of, you've spoken words that would make your grandmother blush, and you've gone places that you'd rather not advertise.
 - There's no denying your sin - it is obvious to anyone and everyone.
 - You know it, and most importantly God knows it.
 - You need to know that God is kind and patient and wants you to walk away from that sin and walk toward him.
 - At the same time, you need to know that his patience and forbearance DOES run out.

- God's mercy is ABUNDANT, but the season of God's patience will not continue forever.
- But there is someone else that this passage is looking at...
- I'm going to say something that may come across as sounding incredibly odd, but in light of this passage, it is nevertheless true.
 - There are some in this room today whose greatest need is to repent of trusting in their own righteousness.
 - If that doesn't make sense to you, then you'll need to go back and watch this again until it does make sense.
 - Your problem is not that you have tried to do what is right.
 - Your problem is that you've begun to trust what is right about you more than what Christ has done for you.
- You've built a life that appears to be working.
 - Your family is good.
 - Your career is good.
 - Your reputation is good.
 - You stay out of trouble.
 - You try to do the right thing.
 - People look at your life and think, "They've got it all together."
 - And somewhere along the way, you've begun to believe it too.
- Not that you're perfect.
 - Just good enough.
 - Good enough that God surely understands.
 - Good enough that God surely approves.
 - Good enough that God surely wouldn't judge.

- But that is precisely the lie Paul has been exposing throughout this chapter.
 - Your greatest problem is not that you think too highly of yourself.
 - Your greatest problem is that you're trusting in yourself at all.
 - There will be people in hell who were better neighbors than many Christians.
 - There will be people in hell who loved their families.
 - People who worked hard.
 - People who paid their taxes.
 - People who were respected by their communities.
 - People who had their lives together.
- But they never came to Christ because they never believed they truly needed Him.
 - They spent their lives comparing themselves to other sinners instead of measuring themselves against a holy God.
 - And if that's you today, God's kindness is inviting you to stop trusting your resume and start trusting His Son.
 - Because the gospel is not that good people get into heaven; the gospel is that guilty people can be forgiven.
- And Christ receives every sinner who comes to Him by faith.
 - Please, heed the dire warning that you are getting today.
 - Just as God shows patience to the unrighteous sinner so that he can be saved.
 - God is also showing patience to the self-righteous sinner.
 - Don't wait. Don't presume upon his kindness, his forbearance, his patience.
 - Don't assume that you are the exception

- The patience of God that you've been presuming upon — it was purchased at a price.
- And that price has already been paid by the shed blood of Jesus.