

Judgment, the Source of Broken Relationships (Romans 3:1–20)

What can be done with a world of people separated from God by idolatry and from one another by judgment? God's true justice is the answer. In Romans 3, as Paul describes what happens in salvation, he puts it in terms of God's justice. "Our injustice serves to confirm the justice of God" (Rom. 3:5).

Before proceeding, we need to say a bit about the terminology of justice and righteousness. Paul uses the Greek word for justice, *dikaioynē* and its various forms, thirty-six times in Romans. It is translated as "righteousness" most often and as "justice" (or "justification") less frequently. But the two are the same in Paul's language. The primary use of *dikaioynē* is in courts of law, where people are seeking justice to restore a situation that is not right. Therefore, salvation means being made right with God (righteousness) and with other people and all of creation (justice). A full exploration of the relationship between the words *salvation*, *justification*, *righteousness*, and *salvation* is beyond the scope of this chapter but will be addressed in any general commentary on Romans.^[1]

If this seems abstract, ask yourself whether you can see concrete implications at work. Is it the case that the (false) judgments people make about one another are the root of broken relationships and injustice where you work? For example, if a manager and employee disagree over the employee's performance review, which of these causes greater damage—the performance gap itself or the hostility arising from their judgment? Or if someone gossips about another person at work, which causes greater damage—embarrassment over the item that was gossiped about or resentment over the judgment revealed by the gossip's tone and the listeners' snickers?

If our false judgment is the root of our broken relationships with God, other people, and the creation, how can we possibly find salvation? The thing we need—justice/righteousness—is the one thing we are most incapable of. Even if we want to be put back into right relationships, our inability to judge rightly means that the harder we try, the worse we make the problem. "Who will rescue me?" Paul cries (Rom. 7:24).

We cannot hope to be rescued by anyone else, for they are in the same boat we're in. "Everyone is a liar," Paul tell us (Rom. 3:4). "There is no one who is righteous, not even one; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned aside, together they have become worthless; there is no one who shows kindness, there is not even one" (Rom. 3:10–12). "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23).

Yet there is hope—not in humanity, but in God's faithfulness. "Will their unfaithfulness nullify the faithfulness of God?" Paul asks. "By no means!" he replies (Rom 3:3–4). On the contrary, "injustice serves to confirm the justice of God." This means our workplaces are settings for grace just as much as our churches or families. If we feel that our workplace is too secular, too unethical, too hostile to faith,

too full of greedy, soulless people, then it is exactly the place where the cross of Christ is effective! God's grace can bring reconciliation and justice in a factory, office block, or petrol station just as fully as in a cathedral, abbey, or church. Paul's gospel is not only for the church, but for the whole world.

ENDNOTES

- [1] See, for example, N. T. Wright, *"The Letter to the Romans,"* vol. 10, *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994).