

## "START WHERE YOU ARE"

(Romans 2:1-16)

(Chuck Swindoll)

In this segment, Paul turned our accusing finger around to point inward and then made a bold declaration; "You have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself" (2:1). The Greek verb translated "judge" here is the same term used by Matthew when recounting the teaching of Jesus: "Do not judge so that you will not be judged" (Matt. 7:1). But did Paul or Jesus mean that we should "see no evil" or allow the sin of another to go unchecked? Certainly not!

Neither Jesus nor Paul suggested that we should be undiscerning, Paul wrote to the church in Corinth concerning a man who had been intimate with his father's wife, "I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present" (I Cor. 5:3). He then called for the man to be put out of the congregation in the hope that the chastisement would bring him to repentance (I Cor. 5:5). Jesus challenged His hearers, "Why do you not even on your own initiative judge what is right?" (Luke 12:57). The Lord gave us a conscience, and He expects us to use it to defend the defenseless and to uphold justice. After all, the safety and health of any community is measured by its laws and how well it prosecutes them. Tolerance without limits is unacceptable.

In warning us not to "judge," Jesus and Paul cautioned against the insidious sin of hypocrisy. When we discern right from wrong and then hold one another accountable, 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 gravely important. Jesus warned, "In the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you" (Matt. 7:2).

The Lord wants us to care about right and wrong. He wants the righteousness of earth to reflect that of heaven. 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. If you genuinely care to eradicate evil from the world, accept Jesus' challenge:

"Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? 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." (Matt. 7:3-5)

This brings us back to Paul's purpose for stating, "in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself" (Rom. 2:1). If we genuinely care about the righteousness of God, if we authentically desire to condemn sin and uphold justice, if we truly want to be champions of good, we must begin with an examination of self. Then, if we have any time remaining, we can call the sin of another into account and we will more likely "judge" with a humble attitude in a spirit of grace.

