

Romans 2, 1-11 Sermon on Day of repentance by Vicar Tobias Schütze

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. ²Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. ³So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? ⁴Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance? ⁵But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. ⁶God "will repay each person according to what they have done."^[a] ⁷To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. ⁸But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. ⁹There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; ¹⁰but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ¹¹For God does not show favoritism.

People always say: "We are innocent." At least we don't like to admit guilt. And if there is no other way, we at least downplay it as much as possible. - It is always the others' fault. In our Bible passage, the apostle Paul mentions three ways in which people, then and now, try to excuse themselves.

Firstly, he mentions the attempt to excuse oneself by saying that one did not know what one should and should not do. "Ignorance is no excuse." This principle was already valid in ancient Rome and still applies today, not only before God, but also in court.

You cannot excuse yourself by saying that you did not know that you were not allowed to steal or not to drive through a red light. Driving through a red light costs €60, there is no discussion about that. Your own ignorance is not a good defense. Like the police, God does not look at what we know, but what we do; he judges the works. Secondly, Paul mentions the attempt to make one's own guilt small and that of others large; to compare oneself. People particularly like to look at the mistakes, flaws and peculiarities of others and use them to excuse their own. Not only the Bible, but also we today know of such attempts.

It is not for nothing that the biblical sayings about the "speck in another's eye and the beam in one's own eye" as well as Jesus' command "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone" have become popular sayings that are not only known to Bible readers and whose meaning everyone understands and can probably relate to quite quickly.

As a schoolchild, for example, I could defend myself as loudly as I wanted for my failed exam. I would then say: At least I wasn't the worst in the class. My parents didn't accept such excuses any more than my teachers did. A failure is a failure, no discussion. And God also knows no relative grading system, where you can excuse yourself because the others are worse and you yourself are actually quite OK in comparison.

Paul tells his readers very clearly: "Therefore, O man," you, you "cannot excuse yourself, whoever you are who judge." - No matter what excuse you look for, you will not find one. No matter how

many of your fellow human beings have a failure too, a failure remains a failure; and you have failed.

The third attempt to maneuver yourself out of the misery, out of a guilty verdict, is to establish a relationship with the judge. If he is your brother, your teammate in the football club, your children's godfather or your best man, then he would certainly kindly downplay your guilt or even let you get away with it completely. It is not for nothing that German law provides for the possibility of removing a judge if there is justified mistrust of his impartiality. But such bias does not only exist in court.

There is hardly a teacher who doesn't have a favorite student. And even if a parent won't openly admit it, it's completely normal to have a favorite child or children. In a survey, at least 70% of parents admitted to having a favorite child. The number of unreported cases is probably much higher. People are biased. And other people know this and try to take advantage of it. God is different. With him there is no "respect of persons", he is completely impartial; he has no favorites. He looks at you, he looks at me, and with both of them he has to say: you, yes, you cannot apologize; you are guilty; you are a sinner; you cannot talk your way out of it. And if anyone has not yet felt addressed, you also have no excuse before the judgment of God.

Even Paul's promise that good people will receive eternal life sounds like mockery and derision here. Because right before that he tells his readers and listeners quite clearly that they have no excuse and are only accumulating the Lord's wrath day after day.

But if we cannot talk our way out of it in all these ways, neither through 1. ignorance nor 2. through a supposedly relatively good life, and 3. God is not partial either, is all hope lost? When I am judged by my works, which are not able to satisfy God and excuse me before God; when it is already clear from the start that you, "O man, you cannot excuse yourself." And in the next chapter: "There is no one righteous, not even one." (Rom 3:10).

The fact that we have come together here for the Day of Repentance and Prayer is precisely this admission. The admission that we cannot free ourselves from our guilt, that we cannot buy ourselves out of it, argue our way out of it, or keep quiet about it. It is an admission that we are not the judges of the sins of others or of our own sins. We can judge as much as we want. That does not change God's judgment, the only decisive judgment.

Instead, repentance is turning away from such attempts to judge others and to excuse ourselves and the realization that we are all dependent on God's "kindness, patience, and longsuffering"; that he must excuse us.

Repentance, both on the Day of Repentance and Prayer and on any other day, leads us to God. It directs our gaze away from ourselves, from our works, to God himself. Together we will immediately go before God and ask for his forgiveness for ourselves and for each other and seek refuge in him; instead of trying to find refuge in ourselves. The focus is not on condemning others, but on the mutual admission that none of us are as we should be, as God created us.

After these sentences from Paul in our Bible, which take away any self-defense from us, he explains in the following chapters that it is not our works, but Christ's work, by which we will be judged by God. And the repentance, the repentance that God gives us, consists in turning to this work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Instead of defending ourselves unsuccessfully and excusing our own actions, in repentance, the gaze is fixed on him who is both judge and judged; who hung on the cross because he took our sin and our guilt upon himself. God, who judges works, judges our works in precisely this work of Jesus Christ. Jesus took sins upon himself, he became sin for us (2 Cor 5:21), and has already borne the sin that we bring before him.

God himself is the one who judges those who are in Christ. And the Father, the judge, gives those who are in Christ "glory and honor and peace," "to the Jew first and also to the Greek." Here, too, God knows no partiality, but judges everyone who is a member of Christ according to Jesus' deeds, and takes care of the members of Christ through the "kindness, patience, and longsuffering" of God. It is not we, but God who excuses. Amen

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.