

**Title: Home Plate Umpire**

Text: Romans 2:1-4

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Theme: Romans

I've played a little baseball, and a lot of softball. I've watched a little baseball on TV, in back yards, and at the stadiums.

When I go, I see players who catch the ball and players who throw the ball. I see players who hit the ball with a bat and then run around the bases.

Most often I see the players make an out. Usually, better than 60 % of the time, they fail to make it on base. (What would you think if I failed 60% of the time)

If they do make it to or past first base they sometimes put their success into jeopardy. Imagine a line drive down the right field line that bounces off the wall. The runner rounds first digging it out for second base. As he closes in on second he sees the third base coach waving him on to third. The runner is pushing it now and is preparing to slide when the third base coach waves him on, encouraging him to try for home. He's not sure where the ball is but his coach has given him the okay to stretch it out.

The right fielder has chased the ball around in the corner of the field but has finally picked it up and with a mighty heave has thrown the ball toward the catcher who is blocking home plate.

The runner sees his team members indicating that he will need to slide into home. The ball is coming and it is a good throw right to the catcher. The runner is fast and quickly approaches the plate. He slides, the ball arrives and the catcher receives the ball and he seeks to put the tag on the runner.

It is very close. Who makes the call? Does the runner get to call himself safe? Does the catcher make the call? No, neither team decides. It is the home plate umpire that ultimately makes the decision.

Have you ever thought about how nice it is to be a part of a church family? We meet once a week on Sunday mornings and sometimes for special meetings like small groups, Wednesday

studies, and specialty ministries like AA, DC4K, and sign language class.

We kind of like each other and enjoy getting together. As we get to know each other better we begin to trust and our relationships deepen. This all sounds pretty good and it is.

But what if, what if we begin to see ourselves as superior because we are not doing all the sin stuff that we see on TV or in the movies. We're not sleeping around, we're not doing illegal drugs, and we're not robbing banks or killing people. Obviously we are better than that kind of people.

Are we? Who makes the call? Who is the home plate umpire?

### **Romans 2:1-4**

*You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. <sup>2</sup>Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. <sup>3</sup>So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? <sup>4</sup>Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?*

\* No one escapes – not the Gentile who never new God's law or the Jew who presumed to hold a place of religious superiority.

\* I'm not positive about this but I believe that the home plate umpire has the last say in any disputes between players or the decisions of other umpires.

God has the last say.

### **Romans 2:1 (The Message)**

*Those people are on a dark spiral downward. But if you think that leaves you on the high ground where you can point your finger at others, think again. Every time you criticize someone, you condemn yourself. It takes one to know one. Judgmental criticism*

*of others is a well-known way of escaping detection in your own crimes and misdemeanors.*

## **I. The Dark Downward Spiral**

A. As to our own sin there is no high ground.

### ***Isaiah 53:6a***

*We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way...*

\* All we have to do is look at the newspaper each day or listen to the news and we can find someone who committed a terrible or horrible crime. When we examine the Lex Luthers of our world we all feel so much more righteous. To our way of thinking their crimes are so much worse than our little indiscretions. How can my little mistruth to a neighbor compare to a mother who kills her children? How can my little indiscretion compare to the prostitute who sells her body for cash?

i. Is there a greater sin than disobedience to God?

\* I know I must be better than a Hitler, a Qadafi, or a Manson. Am I as good as an Abraham Lincoln, a Martin Luther King, or a Billy Graham?

B. All of us have sinned and that is a great disappointment to God.

### ***Romans 2:2 (The Message)***

*But God isn't so easily diverted. He sees right through all such smoke screens and holds you to what you've done.*

## **II. God's Judgment Is True**

- A. God isn't distracted.
- B. God sees through our attempts to fool him.
- C. God holds us accountable.

\* Sports fans around the world can rely on one fact about their sport: the home team wins more often than the visiting team. A 2011 *Sports Illustrated* article concludes: "Home field advantage is no myth. Indisputably, it exists .... Across all sports and at all levels, from Japanese baseball to Brazilian soccer to the NFL, the team hosting a game wins more often than not." What explains this fact?

A wealth of evidence disputes the most common theories behind home team advantage. For instance, thousands of cheering or jeering fans didn't change a team's performance. On a number of statistics—such as pitch velocity in baseball or free throw percentage in basketball (which over two decades was 75.9 percent for home and visiting teams)—home field advantage didn't make a difference. Their research also eliminated other likely theories based on the rigors of travel for the visiting team or the home team's familiarity with their field, rink, or court.

So what drives home field advantage? According to the authors of the article, "Officials' bias is the most significant contribution to home field advantage." In short, the refs don't like to get booed. So when the game gets close, they call fewer fouls or penalties against the home team; or they call more strikes against visiting batters. Larger and louder fans really do influence the calls from the officials. The refs naturally (and often unconsciously) respond to the pressure from the crowd. Then they try to please the angry fans and make the calls that will lessen the pain of crowd disapproval. In the end, the refs' people-pleasing response can have an impact on the final result of the game.

Do you think that you can distract God?

### III. Just As Guilty

**Romans 2:3** (*The Message*)

*You didn't think, did you, that just by pointing your finger at others you would distract God from seeing all your misdoings and from coming down on you hard?*

- A. Our feeble attempts will not distract God.
- B. He sees all of our wrong deeds.
- C. We will be judged accordingly.

\* My family was traveling in the car one day. As Robin and Lori were playing travel Yatzee in the back seat I heard Robin proclaim, “Yatzee.” This she did three turns in a row.

Lori did not know how Robin was doing it. The frustration level was growing as I said, “Robin, quit cheating.”

Robin claimed, “I’m not cheating.”

To which I replied, “Robin, I have been watching you in the rear view mirror.”

Robin replied, “Oh!”

\* God sees all that we have done. He knows the motive for all that we have done.

#### ***Romans 2:4 (The Message)***

*<sup>4</sup>Or did you think that because he's such a nice God, he'd let you off the hook? Better think this one through from the beginning. God is kind, but he's not soft. In kindness he takes us firmly by the hand and leads us into a radical life change.*

#### **IV. The Firm Hand**

- A. Your mistaken if you think that God lacks a heart for discipline.
  - a. Adam and Eve had to leave the Garden of Eden.
  - b. Cain was sentenced to wander the earth after killing his brother.
  - c. Moses was not permitted to enter the Promised Land due to a sinful choice.
  - d. King David sinned and his royal line was filled with wrong choices.
- B. God is kind, but he is not soft.
  - a. I hear so many stories from people seeking help.

- b. Some really do need help and deserve our compassion.
- c. Others just have a story.
- d. I can be fooled but God will not let the untrue rule the day.

C. God uses his firm hand to guide us into right decisions and radical life change.

\* Hans was a loud, over-bearing young man who thought that every girl in school desired him. But when he started to date Martha, he met a girl that knew her Lord Jesus and would not be fooled. She called his bluff and through her witness ended up winning him to the Lord.

Even after they broke up he continued to come to church and sought to worship God. The right decision in his life resulted in radical change.

**Conclusion:** Picture yourself at third base. You have an opportunity to steal home and win the game. You are waiting for a signal from your coach because you know the home plate umpire will either call you safe or out.

Just because you want to score does not guarantee that you will succeed.

God is the home plate umpire. He is rooting for you but will still make the call fairly. Do you want to score? If you want to succeed then you will need to stop trying to pretend with God or fake your way through the church community. God wants a heart that is wholly devoted to him. Is yours?

My goal is to slide into home and hear the home plate umpire call out that wonderful word, "Safe."