

SERIES: IN THE HANDS OF A FAITHFUL GOD

PART 3D: WE'RE ALL OUT OF EXCUSES

In Romans 1:18-32 Paul characterizes those people whom he accuses of perverting their knowledge of God (Gentiles, primarily) in the third person "They turned away from God; God handed 'them' over." But as many scholars have noticed in chapter 2, Paul uses the second person singular, "You," in calling out the group he is addressing. This does not mean that Paul is now accusing his readers of these things; were he to do that, the 2nd persona plural would have been needed. What Paul is doing is using a rhetorical style called diatribe. This diatribe style, which is documented in several ancient authors like Epictetus, as well as in the N.T. in the book of James, uses the literary device of a nonexistent imaginary critic. This critic first appears in v. 1 of chapter 2 when he writes, **"You may think you can condemn such people, but you are just as bad, and you have no excuse."** Although the critic is imaginary, there is no doubt that he represented a class of people who refused to be identified with those who were so scathingly denounced in the first chapter. It is not that this group of people the critic represented disagreed with Paul's evaluation of the moral and spiritual degeneracy of the Gentile world; they wanted to put as much distance as possible between themselves and those whom Paul had exposed. Most likely this invisible spokesperson was representing the Jewish people who were appalled by the idolatry of the Gentiles and all its associations with their deep-rooted monotheism and their abhorrence of idols, they not only rejected the philosophical and moral degeneracy of the Gentiles, but they regarded themselves as philosophically, morally, and spiritually superior. They would insist on being disassociated from anything and everything that might tarnish their reputation or prejudice their position. Here is where Paul was a genius. How do you tell a person who feels, probably, on what might appear to be good grounds, that he or she is morally superior to another, that in actuality their life is equally unacceptable? One method is to blurt it out bluntly and encounter his righteous indignation and total rejection. But Paul has a real disdain for this approach. So what he does is he introduces a broad generality first of all with which most people would agree. The truth is there are a lot of people who sit in judgment of others

who are far from perfect themselves. Then when this has been established and agreed upon, he clearly identifies those who were adopting such an attitude. Paul's fundamental concern is that as humans we often have the capacity to evaluate and criticize the behavior of other people without recognizing that our own evaluation is tainted because of our insistency. The truth is human judgment, which is often necessary, sometimes helpful and occasionally correct, is fundamentally inconsistent.

In a strictly legal sense, many people are deeply offended by the lack of freedom and the absence of justice even in countries which speak loudly and often about "liberty and justice for all." Illustrations abound in our culture of corruption, double standards, human abuse and the miscarriage of justice where ideology has become more important than individuals, and the result is there is gross injustice and abuse prevails. But at another level, in the arena of interpersonal relationships, there is no lack of judgment and criticism, much of which is thoroughly inconsistent. It is precisely this situation that Paul addresses and exposes. He is particularly concerned about those people who feel that their lives are beyond reproach because they hate the great extremes of others. This produces a brand of righteousness based on the faulty logic that says, "Because I don't do what she does I'm better than she, and because I'm better than she I'm all right." Loved ones, this is self-righteousness of the worst kind. It is as ludicrous in its assumptions and conclusion as thinking the assumptions that says that because you owe a million dollars and I only owe half a million dollars, I don't owe as much as you, so therefore I'm free from debt.

Paul's warning to those at Rome who had not gone to the excesses of the Gentiles must be careful in their judgments, as should we, because none of us are without faults. Paul goes so far to say "**You who judge do the same things.**" Though Paul was not saying they were doing the same things overtly, but their covert attitudes were fundamentally similar. Paul says whenever we condemn the actions of others while harboring similar attitudes ourselves amounts to self-condemnation. Paul's purpose is to bring out in bold relief the inconsistency and wrong heartedness of human judgment and condemnation

and serves as a perfect introduction to contrast the integrity of God's Divine judgment.

Please follow along as I read our passage for today.

Romans 2:5-29: "But because you are stubborn and refuse to turn from your sin, you are storing up terrible punishment for yourself. For a day of anger is coming, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. ⁶He will judge everyone according to what they have done. ⁷He will give eternal life to those who keep on doing good, seeking after the glory and honor and immortality that God offers. ⁸But He will pour out His anger and wrath on those who live for themselves, who refuse to obey the truth and instead live lives of wickedness. ⁹There will be trouble and calamity for everyone who keeps on doing what is evil--for the Jew first and also for the Gentile. ¹⁰But there will be glory and honor and peace from God for all who do good--for the Jew first and also for the Gentile. ¹¹For God does not show favoritism. ¹²When the Gentiles sin, they will be destroyed, even though they never had God's written law. And the Jews, who do have God's law, will be judged by that law when they fail to obey it. ¹³For merely listening to the law doesn't make us right with God. It is obeying the law that makes us right in His sight. ¹⁴Even Gentiles, who do not have God's written law, show that they know His law when they instinctively obey it, even without having heard it. ¹⁵They demonstrate that God's law is written in their hearts, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right. ¹⁶And this is the message I proclaim that the day is coming when God, through Christ Jesus, will judge everyone's secret life. ¹⁷You who call yourselves Jews are relying on God's law, and you boast about your special relationship with Him. ¹⁸You know what He wants; you know what is right because you have been taught His law. ¹⁹You are convinced that you are a guide for the blind and a light for people who are lost in darkness. ²⁰You think you can instruct the ignorant and teach children the ways of God. For you are certain that God's law gives you complete knowledge and truth. ²¹Well then, if you teach others, why don't you teach yourself? You tell others not to steal, but do you steal? ²²You say it is wrong to commit adultery, but do you commit adultery? You condemn idolatry,

but do you use items stolen from pagan temples? ²³You are so proud of knowing the law, but you dishonor God by breaking it. ²⁴No wonder the Scriptures say, ‘The Gentiles blaspheme the name of God because of you.’ ²⁵The Jewish ceremony of circumcision has value only if you obey God’s law. But if you don’t obey God’s law, you are no better off than an uncircumcised Gentile. ²⁶And if the Gentiles obey God’s law, won’t God declare them to be His own people? ²⁷In fact, uncircumcised Gentiles who keep God’s law will condemn you Jews who are circumcised and possess God’s law but don’t obey it. ²⁸For you are not a true Jew just because you were born of Jewish parents or because you have gone through the ceremony of circumcision. ²⁹No, a true Jew is one whose heart is right with God. And true circumcision is not merely obeying the letter of the law; rather, it is a change of heart produced by God’s Spirit. And a person with a changed heart seeks praise from God, not from people.”

HOW TO DEAL WITH OUR EXCUSES WHEN IT COMES TO COMMITTING OUR LIVES TO JESUS.

I. **Count on God being impartial at the end of your life.** Romans 2:5-11

A. **God will judge everyone according to what they have done.**

Vs 6 says, “**He God will judge everyone according to what they have done.**” The Bible says that when we rebel against God’s love, character, purpose and plan for our lives we are the one that stores up punishment for ourselves. Colin Kruse writes, “**While it is true that human sin is what attracts God’s wrath and to that extent people may be said to be storing up wrath for themselves by their sinful deeds, it is also the case that God’s decision to defer judgment to provide opportunity for repentance is tantamount to His storing up wrath for those who refuse to repent.**” Paul argues that his imaginary critique is storing up wrath against himself. Starting with vs. 6 Paul stops his address to his critique and adopts the 3rd person as he describes more objectively impartial judgment of God. Paul quotes Proverbs 24:12 and Psalm 62:11-12 “**Don’t excuse yourself by**

saying, 'Look, we didn't know.' For God understands all hearts, and He sees you. He who guards your soul knows you knew. He will repay all people as their actions deserve." Ps 62:11-12 **"God has spoken plainly, and I have heard it many times: Power, O God, belongs to You; 12 Unfailing love, O Lord, is Yours. Surely You repay all people according to what they have done."** We see that our behavior is important to God. It is by our behavior, deeds and works that you demonstrate what is in your heart.

B. God gives eternal life to those who seek what God offers. v. 2:7

As you surrender your life to Jesus Christ your goal in life becomes the pursuit of pleasing Him because of all He has done for you. Paul says God gives "eternal life to those who keep doing good, seeking after the glory and honor and immortality that God offers." When Paul speaks of works or deeds here he does not mean careful observance of the Mosaic Law so as to merit salvation. Good works for Paul in other texts relates to the behavior expected of followers of Christ, those who are already saved. Paul writes in Colossians 1:9-10 **"So we have not stopped praying for you since we first heard about you. We ask God to give you complete knowledge of His will and to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding. 10 Then the way you live will always honor and please the Lord, and your lives will produce every kind of good fruit."**

C. God pours out His anger for those who selfishly refuse to obey the truth. v. 8

So God gives eternal life to those who pursue seeking after the glory, honor and immortality that only God can offer. In vs.8 our righteous and loving God will pour out His anger on those who live for themselves and refuse to obey the truth and instead live lives of wickedness. N.T. Wright states, **"The attitude of the two groups is not described in moralistic terms. Paul does not, as a rabbi might have done, produce a list of things that will qualify or disqualify for 'the age to come.' Rather, the one group, by 'patience in well doing,' seeks for glory, honor and immortality. Paul does not say that they earn them or grasp them; merely that they are seeking them.**

The other group, seeking their own selfish gain, does ‘not obey the truth but obey injustice, more specific than wickedness or evil. The first group is defined in terms of that for which they seek and the means by which that quest is pursued; the second, in terms of that which is obeyed and not obeyed.’ I love this, church.

D. God shows no favoritism.

VS. 11 Paul writes, “**For God does not show favoritism.**” The Bible says God is loving and fair in how He judges both the Gentile and the Jew. He has no favorites, or you can say we’re all His favorites. He sent His Son to die for our sins and to pay our penalty so that we can be made right with Him. It is up to each one of us to decide whether we will accept what He has done on our behalf or not. There are eternal consequences for the choices we make.

II. Consider God will judge all of our secrets through Christ Jesus. vv. 2:12-16

Verses 12-16 explain further what is involved in vs. 7-11. God will judge Jew and Greek alike, in complete impartiality for those without the law, and those within the law will be judged justly. Paul is most likely responding to an implicit Jewish interjection: “We at least have Torah; that sets us apart from the Gentiles.” Wright argues, “**Here we meet for the first time a crucial point, without which much of Romans remains incomprehensible: ‘those apart from the law’ means quite simply ‘Gentiles,’ and ‘those under the law’ (literally ‘those in the law’) means ‘Jews.’**”

A. People instinctively obey God’s truth without knowing it. v. 2:14

This is amazing. Paul argues that Gentiles have written on their hearts the moral norms of the law. Occasionally they obey these moral norms, although they usually fail to keep the laws so their consciences will accuse them on the final Day of Judgment. Again, humanity will stand before God with no excuse. At our core we know at some level how God has created us to live. In Romans 1:18-21 the Bible says we know the truth about God but we suppress it by our

own rebellion, selfishness and wickedness. There are those who do not accept Christ, but they instinctively obey some of God's law.

B. People's conscience accuses or confirms they're doing right.

This is awesome. Paul argues that God's moral law is written on our hearts, and it is attested by our conscience. Witherington writes, **"Paul assumes that sometimes some Gentiles fulfill some of the requirements of the Law, just as Jews do. This does not mean they always do so, or do so perfectly, for Paul will go on to call all sinners. It does mean that there is some obedience to the will or law of God among those who are not Christians, with Gentiles in focus here."**

III. Commit yourself to surrender to the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. vv. 2:17-29

A. A true change of your heart comes from letting the Holy Spirit have His way.

vv. 28-29 **"For you are not a true Jew just because you were born of Jewish parents or because you have gone through the ceremony of circumcision. 29 No, a true Jew is one whose heart is right with God. And true circumcision is not merely obeying the letter of the law; rather it is a change of heart produced by God's Spirit. And a person with a changed heart seeks praise from God, not from people."** Paul uses the metaphor of circumcision as the circumcision experienced by Christ on the cross which references metaphorically to His death. Colossians 2:11-12 in the ESV states, **"In Jesus also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ. 12 Having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised Him from the dead."** What Paul is arguing in Romans chapter 2 and the entire book as well in Colossians 2 is that Paul appeals to what Christ has accomplished for us in His saving work in the cross. In referring to the circumcision of Christ as His horrific death on the cross, he summarizes the

essential affirmations of Christianity: Christ died, was buried, and was raised from the dead and seated at the right hand of the Father. Paul interprets Christ's death as a vicarious circumcision for us. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:14-15 **“Either way, Christ’s love controls us. Since we believe that Christ died for all, we also believe that we have all died to our old life. 15 He died for everyone so that those who receive His new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ, who died and was raised for them.”** As you repent of your sins and turn to God and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who will convict and convince you to surrender your life to the Holy Spirit. Deuteronomy 10:16 says, **“Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.”** Circumcise here symbolizes removing the stubbornness that prevents the heart from properly loving and serving God. Jeremiah 6:10b in the ESV says, **“Behold, their ears are uncircumcised, they cannot listen.”** Same verse in NLT says, **“There ears are closed, and they cannot hear. They scorn the word of the Lord. They don’t want to listen at all.”** If you’re here today and you have never surrendered your heart--the control center of your life--to Jesus Christ, I encourage you to do so today. The fact that you’re considering making this decision tells you that the Holy Spirit is speaking to you and drawing you to Jesus. I will show you how you can do this.

B. The result of a changed heart is you seek praise from God, not people.

Paul writes in 2:29b **“And a person with a changed heart seeks praise from God, not from people.”** In addressing his imaginary critic Paul implies that those who brag about the law (Torah)--the books of Moses--and put their confidence in being circumcised physically, are seeking praise from other people, but not from God, and by so doing demonstrate that their hearts have not been circumcised by the Holy Spirit.

Here is a leading clue whether you have truly surrendered your life to the resurrected Jesus Christ. Who do you live your life for? Deep down inside you do you long to hear praise you, accept you, affirm you? The Bible argues that

when you have had the hardness, rebellion, lust and arrogance cut away from your life by identifying with Jesus Christ and His life, death, resurrection, and ascension through your repentance and then following Him in water baptism, you're on your way to living your life for Him. When you truly desire to bring honor and glory to Jesus you will listen to the leading, impressions and directions of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer.