

The Condemnation of the Moralist (2:1-16)

- Paul addresses those “morally upright” people (the “moralist”) who see themselves as better than others (cf Lk 18:11-12). He refutes these “good” people and reveals that they are equally guilty and condemned before God.
- Paul’s use of a Greco-Roman rhetorical device known as “diatribe”:
 - The use of dialogue with an imaginary interlocuter or opponent - “*O man.*”
 - The use of rhetorical questions - 2:3-4; 3:1-6.

1. God’s Judgment is according to Truth (2:1-5)

- The “morally upright” man is condemned before God by his own judgment because he is guilty of the same sins as others. It is always easier to see the mote in someone else’s eye than the plank in our own (eg. David’s sins of adultery & murder). Our sins may not be as blatant as others, but we are guilty of many of the same offenses. We might have committed these sins in our heart (Matt 5:22, 28), or perhaps, it is a matter of degree, but by God’s standard, it is still sin.
- God keeps perfect record & He will judge according to the truth, and not as our conduct may appear to people. We might be righteous in our own eyes, but God looks at our heart. The omniscient God sees both our external action and heart (Parable of the “Older Brother”).
- We are wrong to think that we shall escape God’s judgment because we are outwardly better than other people. No one is so good & free from sin that he can judge others (Matt 7:1-2; John 8:1-11). Paul warns against misinterpreting God’s forbearance and longsuffering which are intended to encourage repentance and not self-righteous complacency (2 Peter 3:9). The moralist thinks he treasures up merit with God as he condemns sinners around him. But, unless he repents, he is storing up accumulated guilt for the day of wrath.

2. God’s Judgment is based on a Person’s Practice (2:6-10)

- With a quotation from Ps 62:12, Paul says, God will judge each man according to his deeds or works. Paul is not describing the basis for salvation but the basis for judgment. If a person is truly saved, there will be outward evidence in one’s life, and conversely the unsaved will exhibit no such evidence. The deeds of men provide an infallible index of their character; these acts provide the evidence by which God judges – Jer 17:10; 32:19; Ezk 33:20; Matt 16:27; Rev 2:23; 20:12; 22:12, etc. We must lean on God’s grace not only for salvation, but also for perseverance in good works (Eph 2:8-10).
- Paul portrays 2 classes of people:
 - The 1st is those who patiently labour in “well doing” looking forward to eternal life. Obedience & perseverance are the invariable marks of the righteous.
 - The other class of people are contentious (self-willed) and disobedient; and their end will be tribulation and anguish (vv8-9).

- God applies the principle of judgment equally to Jews and Gentiles, but He will pour out His wrath on the “Jew first.” The Jews are more accountable than the Gentiles, in that God chose to reveal Himself to them and bring the Saviour through them; so, they will be first in either judgment or salvation (Lk 12:48).

3. God’s Judgment is Impartial (2:11-16)

- The Gentiles do not have the Law in the sense that God did not give it to them. Therefore, God will not judge them by the Law. The Jews in Paul’s day have the Law, and God would judge them by it. According to v12a: (i) all who are without the Law will “also” perish; (ii) those who have never heard the gospel are not innocent before God - they “*have sinned without law*” - and will not be excused from God’s judgment. There is no innocent heathen!
- The Gentiles, who did not have the Law, will be judged apart from the Law. The Jews, who received God’s Law, will be judged by the Law. Both groups have sinned and both groups will be judged for their sin. God is just. God will judge every person, Gentile or Jew, according to their response to the revelation & knowledge that they are given.
- The Jews who have “*sinned in (under) the law*” be judged by the standard that is in the Law. Paul says in v13, “hearing it is not enough; the key issue is, doing it.” The justified person is a doer of the Law; he obeys God’s Word as a way of life. A person’s life reveals the reality of his faith (Matt 7:21).
- Those who do not know the Law have an unwritten law within their hearts. Heathens, who do not have God’s Law, have an instinctive or built-in sense of right and wrong that coincides with God’s Law because God has written it upon their hearts (cf Jer 31:33; 2 Cor 3:3). God has written on the heart of every man a basic moral code. Although the heathens have not been given the 10X, they know that it is wrong to murder, steal, lie, commit adultery, etc. (cf Gen 26:6-11; Acts 28:3-4). And God will judge them by this law. God measures us by our own yardstick, and we come up short every time!
- The Gentiles do not have the Law as a moral guide, but they do have an inner law that guides their conscience. They have a conscience that bears witness to them of right and wrong. Conscience is an important part of human nature, defective though it may be because of sin (Titus 1:15; 1 Tim 4:2). Their conscience is bearing witness of their thoughts - *and their thoughts the mean* (between themselves) *while accusing or else excusing one another*” – or, their moral decisions will accuse or defend and excuse them.
- God will impartially judge everyone. Those who have the Law do have a stricter accountability to God. Scripture is clear that all unconverted people will come under the wrath of God (1:18). Every one of us has rejected the knowledge of God, so we are not innocent. Everyone has sinned (3:23) and is deservedly under the wrath of God.

- On judgment day, God will judge everyone according to the gospel:
 - There will be a certain day of judgment (Acts 17:31).
 - God will judge the secrets of everyone. God doesn’t just look at our outward deeds.
 - God has given all judgment to His Son (John 5:22-23). For Christ to sit in judgment on the secrets of all men, He must have infinite knowledge, which only God can have.
 - This judgment is according to Paul’s gospel or is in complete harmony with the gospel that Paul preaches. We will be judged by the gospel, and the gospel commands that all men everywhere repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. There will not be a different standard for those who have not heard. They will be judged by the gospel.
- There is no special privilege for those who think they are better than others. God is a righteous judge. His judgment is impartial. Where do you stand before God (Lk 5:32)?

Notes