
Part 1 - Reflect and Respond

- œ In the context of a clear, condemning but non-converting revelation by creation, man responded by:
 - œ Suppression of that knowledge (v.18),
 - œ Speculating about the means of that knowledge (v.21) and
 - œ Substituting for the great Object of that knowledge (v.25).
- œ They did so from hearts that:
 - œ Believed lies (v.25) and
 - œ Followed lusts (v.26).
- œ Thus they exchanged:
 - œ The glory of God (v.23-24),
 - œ The truth of God (v.25) and
 - œ The design of God (v.26-27).
- œ This resulted, at each step, God giving them over to:
 - œ Impurity (v.24),
 - œ Degradation (v.26) and
 - œ Depraved minds (v.28).

So, everyone, everywhere at all times sins in the presence of light.

THEREFORE

We must cry out for mercy...

We must carry the gospel to the lost...

The Principle of Universal Law

(2:1-3:8)

So, they have no excuse (1:20). Now, you have no excuse (2:1). Paul turns from the universal revelation of the wrath of God that condemns to the universal presence of the law that condemns. He turns from talking about them to talking to you, from the outer circle where we generally say we are not to one of the inner circles where we sit exposed for what we really are.

Condemning Self-Righteous Moralists

(2:1-16)

In the face of our tendency to self-justification, Paul characterizes the judgment of God. Within the circle of critical, self-righteous moralists will be Gentiles like Seneca, Plato and Aristotle, as well as unbelieving conservatives of all ages like Rush Limbaugh. Also within that circle are Jews who are also self-righteous moralists.

It is Inescapable

(v.1-4)

¹ Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. ² We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. ³ Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? ⁴ Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

The fact that we pass judgment on the behavior of others is inescapable evidence that we understand there is right and wrong. It is also evidence that the source of that determination lies outside of ourselves. It betrays that we do not see the goodness and kindness of God as leading us to inward and outward transformation, to repentance. The self-righteous moralist never sees himself as vulnerable and exposed to the wrath of God.

It is Inflexible

(v.5-8)

⁵ But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

⁶ He will render to each one according to his works: ⁷ to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; ⁸ but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.

The self-righteous moralist does not see that it is the inflexible and inescapable standards that are applied to the heart. So our very moralism functions as stubbornness and unrepentance. Yet the standard will not change. God will reward and punish, according to Psalm 62:12, on the basis of deeds. Do not let verses 7-8 shake you. Here is the standard: those who always (meaning without ever failing) do good will receive eternal life. Those who persist in doing evil (in both heart and action) will receive punishment. The problem is that no one meets the standard. Only one person has lived out the standard and this because He Himself is the embodiment of the standard, the Lord Jesus.

It is Impartial**(v.9-11)**

⁹ There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, ¹⁰ but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. ¹¹ For God shows no partiality.

This standard will be applied without distinction to all by an impartial God. The moralist always sees himself as having a special standing in God's sight. Here, Paul levels the playing field. Even Jewish moralists are subject to God's wrath.

It is Inclusive**(v.12-16)**

¹² For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. ¹³ For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. ¹⁴ For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵ They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them ¹⁶ on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

It includes those who have the Law and those who do not. Those who have God's will in His Word will be judged by that Word. Those who do God's will without His Word will be judged by the conscience that allows or disallows. The argument comes to thundering conclusion here in verses 14-15. Everyone is subject to being indicted under law. The Jews have the law written in Scripture. The Gentiles have the law written on their hearts in their consciences. In the end, all will be judged according to the gospel; or as Paul puts it, "my gospel."

Condemning Religious Legalists**(2:17-3:8)**

The powerful progression of this indictment now moves against the religionist, the Jew who relied in his good works.

Who Defame the Honor of God**(v.17-24)**

¹⁷ But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God ¹⁸ and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law; ¹⁹ and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, ²⁰ an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth— ²¹ you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? ²² You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³ You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. ²⁴ For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

Here they are with all their privileges and pride. For all their light, they do not illuminate God. Instead, they have obscured Him. The inconsistency between what they know, what they proclaim and how they live all serve to dishonor God. In the end, the Gentiles blaspheme instead of bowing to God.

The powerful indictment of the Jews and all religionists turns on verse 23. Those who boast in having the Scripture and who break the Scripture, dishonor God. How we who say we love God's Word must be careful to live God's Word unless we turn people away from God and His Word.

Who Focus on Externals

(v.25-29)

²⁵ For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. ²⁶ So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? ²⁷ Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. ²⁸ For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. ²⁹ But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

Circumcision is an example of a religious rite that was supposed to symbolize a spiritual reality, not procure it. The Jews trusted that being circumcised established their relationship with God and gave that right standing so that they would be accepted. The problem was that disobedience to the rest of the Law undid the obedience to that one aspect of the Law.

In fact, even the Old Testament called for a circumcision of the heart. It is not a matter of externals, but issues of the heart. It is not, for example, that being baptized saves, but that those who believe and are saved, will be baptized. It is that the external obedience flows from a changed heart.

One other theme is being advanced here: the unity of the Jew and Gentile. Paul here defines who the true Jews were and are. Make no mistake that this is not just for now, but he reads this back into the Old Testament, as we will later see. A true Jew is one who has the inner work of the Spirit and is accepted and acknowledged by God. Thus, the Jew and Gentile are one on the grounds of God's inward and transforming work of the Spirit. The essential unity of Jews and Gentiles is in their common sinfulness and in their common salvation.

Who Hide behind Objections

(3:1-8)

¹ Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? ² Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. ³ What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? ⁴ By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written,

“That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged.”

⁵ But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.) ⁶ By no means! For then how could God judge the world? ⁷ But if through my lie God's truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? ⁸ And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.

Paul then confronts the Jewish objections to his way of presenting the gospel. He models for us how to do apologetics; that is, how we anticipate and answer objections to the gospel. In doing so, he lays the foundation for what will come in Romans 9-11. So I will deal with this section briefly and save the details for later. Paul's teaching so far invokes 4 distinct, but related objections. It undermines God's covenant (v.1-2). It nullifies God's faithfulness (v.3-4). It impugns God's justice (v.5-6). And it falsely promotes God's glory (v.7-8). Paul responds by pointing to their having the very Word of God, which they did not believe. But their unbelief does not nullify God's faithfulness and it invokes the justice of God. The last objection is simply dismissed as being absurd.

At the end of the day, Paul anticipates and responds to valid objections. But generally, sinners are just hiding behind them.

The Pronouncement of Universal Damnation (3:9-20)

At the end of a trial, the lawyers bring what are called *The Closing Arguments*. Here they do their best to clinch the case. This is what we have here. The prosecuting attorney now closes the case.

Summary Charge (v.9)

⁹ What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin,

Everyone is under the cruel and crushing weight of sin. We are all in bondage to it and enslaved under it and subject to its just penalty.

Scriptural Proof (v.10-18)

¹⁰ as it is written:

“None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God.

¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”

¹³ “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.”

“The venom of asps is under their lips.” ¹⁴ “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”

¹⁵ “Their feet are swift to shed blood; ¹⁶ in their paths are ruin and misery,

¹⁷ and the way of peace they have not known.”

¹⁸ “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

Since the gospel is promised and prophesied in the Old Testament, we should expect that the final pronouncement should rest solidly on a text of Scripture. And it does. Paul brings to the fore one of the longest Old Testament quotes in the New Testament. He does so by knitting together a fabric of description and denunciations calculated to close his case.

Stott points out that these Scriptures paint a grim picture of sin. It declares the ungodliness of sin, demonstrates the pervasiveness of sin and teaches the universality of sin. It shows that sin has made man unable to please, seek or obey God. Verses 10-12 describes the total

inability of man, the extent and power of his depravity. Verses 13-17 illustrates the immorality of man, the examples and patterns of his depravity. Verse 18 concludes with the underlying cause and effect: man does not fear God.

Concluding Purpose

(v.19-20)

¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. ²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

This final paragraph serves to conclude the charge. It points to the purpose of this long section and the function of the Scripture in that charge.

At the end of the day, the weight of the argument is meant to silence the sinner. There is nothing left to say. That is because everyone is being made accountable to God. It is not man's standard of righteousness and justice that is condemning, but it is God's righteous standard. And that standard is found in the Law. The Law was not given to save. The Law was given to expose sin. The works of Law are futile for salvation, yet is revelatory of our sin.

We stand charged before God and silenced before His righteous wrath. And the law cannot bring us forgiveness, it can only pronounce God's judgment. O, what will we do? How will we have a righteousness before God that He accepts and thus accepts us?

"Now a righteousness apart from the Law appears, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ to those who believe." (Romans 3:21-22, Abridged)

Section 2 - Reflect and Respond

It seems to me that there are two appropriate responses to this terrible denunciation on man's horrific, sinful plight.

We must cry out for mercy. We must see ourselves in all our sinfulness. It may be the sinfulness of a depraved pagan society. Or it may be the sinfulness of a critical moralist. Or it may be the sinfulness of a self-righteous religious legalist (whether Jew or Gentile). But we are all subject to the wrath of God. Every one of us. All are under sin. All are under judgment. All are subject to wrath. Your good works cannot save you. Your religion cannot save you. And frankly, having a personal relationship with God (whatever that means) cannot save you. Only having a right standing with God by believing in Jesus, our Redeemer and Ruler, can we be saved from the wrath to come. So repent and believe, today. Now.

We must carry the gospel to the lost. If every one you meet, if your nice neighbor who borrows your sugar and cooks out with you; if your family – father, mother, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, grandparents; if the waitress at your favorite restaurant, the person in the cubicle by you or on the machine beside you; if the person who sits next to you on the plane, or even at church are all doomed under the wrath of God, then we must take them the gospel. Why? Because God is glorified when sinners bow and believe when saints proclaim and witness. Let all mouths be stopped before God and opened before men.