

Romans 2:1-16 – Without Excuse

heavy text – hypocrisy, judgement (Joy Pray)

Opening Illustration: excuses/exceptions

- We have all made excuses and we have all had times where we thought because of who we are we should be the exception to certain responsibilities – **But have you ever come face to face with the severity of your sin or the evil of your hypocrisy and realized I am now left without excuse and I cannot minimize my responsibility or sin – I have talked about such a moment in my life when I was confronted in serious immorality and sin and left with no excuses, no exceptions to spare me from the consequences and the penalty that my sin deserved**

Context: In the text that we looked at last week Paul has been thundering down in indictment of the pagan gentile world for their debauchery – **And now it is as if Paul is imagining the moralists (in particular the Jews) in the congregation saying amen, amen, amen those Gentiles sinners are rightly condemned for their sin – And then Paul turns on a dime in a sense to that man on the 3rd row amening last week's sermon and the condemnation of the sins of the pagan and says you sir "your amen is turned now on you!" and you too are without excuse or exception before the judgment seat of God!**

- Paul in a sense is using a similar technique to Amos who listed out the sins of the neighboring countries of Israel to draw them in before turning his focus to their lists of sin – **Or he is like Nathan before David pointing out hypocrisy in a story of man's hypocrisy before turning to David and saying "you're the man! – And now Paul turns to Israel (AND IN A SENSE TO US) and says you are the man**
- I think this text is best set in light of the Parable of the 2 Sons (Prodigal Son) – **Last week we looked at the younger son who wasted his life with wild living and now we turn our focus to the just as lost older brother who thinks he deserves the father's love because of his goodness – And Paul now like Jesus turns to the moralist or Pharisee and says you are just as without excuse as the man who wasted his life in wild living**

Summary of the Text: Paul's point is that while God is faithful to Israel it does not matter – *Whether you are a moralist or immoralist, whether you are religious or irreligious, whether you have the Law or do not have the Law, whether you are a Jew or you are a Gentile; you will face the final judgment according to your works and are therefore without excuse before an impartial God*

We are without excuse because of our hypocrisy (V. 1-5) and God's impartiality (V. 6-16)!

I. (READ v. 1-5) Our Hypocrisy: We condemn in others what we condone in ourselves

The "therefore" connects to chapter 1 in order to instruct the Jews that if God's wrath is revealed against the sins of the pagans who have exchange the truths about God for a lie – **It will also be revealed against you who do the same things – This does not mean necessarily that the Jews do every sin mentioned in chapter 1 it does however mean the catalogue of sin (v. 29 and 30) characterize them and therefore they to will be judged!**

- In order to do this Paul will employ a literary device called a diatribe in which he puts forward an imaginary religious/moralist opponent (mainly in mind is the Jews but any moralist) – **This opponent believes in his own superiority over others on the basis of his covenantal status – In the text Paul now anticipates his objections and demolishes them as Paul moves from the openly depraved in chapter 1 (no pretense and are never "in church") to the secretly depraved in chapter 2**

(this might rightly apply to a people who are always “in church” and who appear to be good – the man on the 3rd row)

- This group will not be judged because they judge – 1) Paul is judging in both chapters and 2) in 1 Cor. 2:15 we are called to judge all things in the sense of agreeing with God’s verdict of what is right and wrong and 3) we are to hold ourselves and others accountable for sin – *But what Paul is condemning here is not the judging but the fact that you practice the very things you condemn in others* (ministry of confrontation – log/speck)

Paul says you rightly know God judges such thing and then he presents the opponent with a piercing question you will be judged and he does so with a question – **do you think you will escape the judgment of God for doing the exact same things, hypocrite?** – *This is reminiscent of Matt. 23 where Jesus flat out calls the Pharisees hypocrites (you are like whitewashed tombs but on the inside you are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness) and you miss the fact that the judgment of God you amen for others will fall on you!*

- This should bring us face to face in areas where we might tend to be hypocrites or self-righteous:
 - o **Hypocrites:** Why is it we tend to think the best in ourselves or so easy to excuse/defend our own sin while being so quick to see it in others? Or why is it we so easily see disgraceful behavior in others while seeing it as not so serious in ourselves? (Illustration – College GF: *In college I began to date a girl who I was very upset with once I learned of her past immorality and I would constantly throw it in her face while at the same time being immoral with her – THAT IS HYPOCRISY AND THE VERY THING THAT PAUL IS HAMMERING HERE*)
 - o **Self-righteousness:** This sort of hypocrisy leads to self-righteousness when we condemn in others what we normally indulge in – Illustration – Impatience: *I struggle with it to the point that in the past I have even thrown a penny out of my car at another car for going slow and so it is something I set my sights on killing in my life – And I remember going with my family from the border of Jordan into Israel which was taking forever... and I remember catching my self-righteous hypocrisy as inwardly in a moment of victory I thought to myself oh thank you Lord that I am not like them (I AM THE SORT OF MAN PAUL IS ADDRESSING HERE!)*
 - o Paul is telling his opponent (and us) in no uncertain terms that taking the moral high ground is not a safe place to hide from the wrath to come – **You will not be immune from the rules to which you subject others**

Paul poses a 2nd stinging question and hope we feel the force: Do you presume on God’s kindness and misunderstand it – **Again this is mainly levied at the Jews who presume because of the past patience by which God has dealt with them and because of privileged status as God’s people that He will always shield them from His wrath – Thus they are not only blind to their hypocrisy but they make a mockery of the kindness and patience of God**

- The fact that God has delayed His judgment should not lead you to presumption on that kindness or even here to further stubbornness but should lead to a repentant heart – **Those that do presume upon His kindness and don’t repent are given over to a harden heart – And because of this they are STORING UP** (*ironic usage here because in the OT this sort of phrase was used to picture the storing up of future blessing for the world to come*) **wrath for themselves as if a water is accumulating and accumulating behind a dam until it breaks and divine wrath overtakes you!**
- The younger brother who loved pleasure more than God and the older brother who loved his image and goodness more than God are both storing up wrath for the day of God’s wrath – *Again this is no back rub but we preach this book to you because we believe that truth sets free!*

Some applications and questions for this section:

- When you see sin in others does it drive you to self-righteousness or does it make you consider your own proclivities to sin? *Are you like the Pharisee who says oh thank you God that I am not like*

them or are you like the tax collector who cant even lift his head but pleads have mercy upon me (that is the real sinners prayer!)

- In what ways are you a hypocrite – Do you say you love and yet never do something to demonstrate that love? Do you say end human trafficking and yet click on that pornographic video?
- Do you presume upon God – *Do you ever think I know this is wrong but I am going to do it anyways and I will just ask God for forgiveness – That is a dangerous game: Let me be clear on one thing, God does not owe us forgiveness and He will not be presumed upon!*
- What is God’s kindness for – *Is it for a happier life (maybe a bigger house or better job) or is it primarily to lead you toward godliness and repentance so you will look more like Jesus?*
 - o See the mercy of God here: God here is showing kindness giving him a chance to wake up to his hypocrisy and to have a profound change of heart so that we would despise our hypocrisy and cry out for His mercy – *This could look like a husband who offends his wife: he can either humble himself and say “I am so sorry, please forgive me” or he can remain haughty and harden his heart toward her – Friends if we will understand God’s kindness and patience we would understand that a little humility and repentance would change the world!*

Francis Schaeffer gave a great little illustration to close out this section: He speaks of having an invisible tape recorder (MP3 Player) around our necks which would record everything we say to others and what we say about others (and how they live) – And on the last day God the judge will take that recording and say I will be completely fair and I will only judge you on the basis of your standards for others that’s on this recording – And what Paul is saying, “do you think you will escape god’s judgment?”

II. God's Impartiality: We will be held accountable based on our works (2:6-11) regardless of how we received the Law (2:12-16)

- a. (READ V. 6-11) We are judged based on our works

Paul introduces a theological concept known as sole competency that states people will individually be held accountable to God – *And neither one’s family (Children listen), church membership, nor religious status affects that individual’s judgment – Everyone of us will be held be judged based on what we have done not any bloodline, heritage, or religious spin we put on our lives*

- In these verses we are presented with 2 motives for our actions/works – *Those who are others seeking (glory of God which is what we were created for) or those who are self-seeking seeking their own glory – The path for one is mentioned in verse 7 and 10 (persevering in doing good) and the other path mentioned in verse 8 (those who are selfishly ambitious and obedient to unrighteousness)*

The first path leads to eternal life and so what is Paul saying here: Well I think there are 2 options of which I think there are compelling arguments for both: 1) Paul is either speaking of a hypothetical man who by perfectly doing the things mentioned would receive eternal life but as Paul will say later no such man exists so these verse should expose our need of the gospel or 2) This is speaking of Christians who are justified by faith which results in a perseverance of obedience (patience in well-doing) which then gives evidence of that justified life that was taken hold of by faith alone but by a faith that is not alone but instead involves a persevering fruitfulness (ala James 2) which in no way contradicts a gospel that is free and wholly of Sovereign Grace

- So regardless of which option we take we know 2 things are true: 1) based on Romans 3 and other places no one is justified by works because none are righteous and thus we need another’s righteousness 2) But we also know if we say we have faith but is a faith that doesn’t produce the fruit of the Spirit in union with Christ it is evidence that we have indeed not been truly justified by our

faith – I lean toward this position because of his talk of repentance in the previous verses which indicated Paul is not thinking in an all or nothing type way about righteousness here but I would not argue with you over this one at all because I think both can easily fit!

- **Piper says it like this:** Verse 7 says, "To those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, [God will give] eternal life." What does that mean? The first answer would say, it means that God would give eternal life on the basis of perfect obedience if anybody had it. But nobody does, and so the point of the verse is simply to stress the hopelessness of man without the gospel of grace. The other answer would say, it means that God does indeed give eternal life to those who persevere in obedience not because this obedience is perfect or because it is the basis or the merit of eternal life, but because saving faith always changes our lives in the power of the Holy Spirit so that true believers persevere in doing good. In other words, a changed life of obedience to God's truth (verse 8) is not the basis of eternal life, but the evidence of authentic faith which unites us to Christ who is the basis of eternal life.

So the question of which path you are on boiled down to do you seek the glory of God or do you seek self-glory (or do you do good for the sake of God or for the sake of yourself) – *Do you have a life that is persistent in good works and a life oriented toward the glory of God that diligently seeks the things above through prayer and treasuring the word and works of God seen most clearly in the face of Christ which will transform us* – **If so what awaits you: Eternal life, honor and not shame, peace and not distress!**

- **Or do you intensely seek after self-glory in this selfie generation:** Every generation has been a look at me generation we just have more ways of showing it now – **I heard a stat this week that something like 60% of teens think they will be famous some day – We are wired to enjoy glory and honor and immortality because they are good things to seek but as one commentator said: The issue not the goals but the means because we look for them in created things rather than in creator god!**
- **What awaits the self-seeking who have turned from God to themselves and to creation and obey unrighteousness (what a phrase) – Wrath and fury and distress as Paul does not give an overestimated view of human goodness nor a soft view of God's holiness – And just picture the distress to come: It will be like a flu in which you are sick but a flu that will never be cured as you are miserable for eternity because of your self-indulgence and your refusal to turn to the creator who has given you life!**
 - o *My appeal to you is to understand that the glory you are seeking here will be as nothing compared to the glory that will be revealed to us through Christ as we enter into His Kingdom don't turn toward poor substitutes!*

And this judgment according to what we have done will be totally fair and impartial as God does not show favorites – **He is not like a corrupt referee who is a homer or can be bribed – You will be without exception or excuse before the judgment seat of God and his assessment of you on the last day will be final and it will be individual and as we will see in a moment it will be comprehensive!**

b. (READ V. 12-16) We are judged regardless of how we received the Law

Paul continues to unpack God's impartiality as says all will be judged according to the standards that they have received – **He will judge not based on appearance, citizenship, religious advantage, nor even how we have received the law (whether on tablets or written on the heart) – But we will be held to account because we all violate the awareness of right and wrong we have received and are therefore without excuse!**

- Paul is saying here that even if you do not have the law there is a law written on your heart that your conscience bears witness to – **This would have been on the Israelites hearts before they received the law as well because the 10 commandments are simply a reflection of what God has**

written on the heart – The 10 commandments would not have been surprising to the Israelites: They wouldn't have been like whoa I can't murder someone well that's a game-changer!

- **And so you are held to account regardless of how you received the law**
 - o **Whether you received the mosaic law on tablets: The Jews** – *Who seem to be his main target and are held to a higher account because they have a 2-fold witness to the law (inner) and (outer)*
 - o **Or whether you have received on your heart with a built-in sense of right and wrong because we are made in His image – And your conscience attests to this inner law as your conscience is pleased when you do right and you feel the guilt when you do wrong – This is not to say as we see in chapter 1 that over time you cannot sear that conscience so that you suppress the truth but it is saying that this inner law is sufficient to render people accountable**
 - o **In conclusion both are held to account because through their sin they have failed to live up to the standard of right and wrong that they have received – Thus Paul's teaching of grace alone in no way nullifies the law because in fact Jesus of Nazareth will judge all people in accordance to what they have done in relation to it!**

And so because all have sinned and thus none are perfect there is a day coming when all the secrets of men will be exposed (a comprehensive) before Jesus who is both the standard and the judge – Consider the seriousness of that day when not only will the worst things you have ever done but the worst things you have ever thought will be held to account by God – And there will be no do over on that day, no getting off the hook and no human protest, no excuse, no exception to slow the wrath of God

- **As RG Lee said in his famous sermon PayDay Someday: God's payday train is pulling into the station and all the powers of men and hell cannot put on the breaks to put out the steam**

Conclusion – WE ARE ALL WITHOUT EXCUSE SO WHAT THEN MUST WE DO - find a righteousness that is not our own through rep and faith