

The Jews Are Sinners Too

Romans 2:1-3:8

Paul is showing where the whole world stands before God, the Judge. In chapter 1:18-32, he spoke of how God's wrath was being universally revealed against 'all the godlessness and wickedness of humanity' (v. 18). The just God simply cannot tolerate the unrighteous behavior he sees, and even before the last day he begins to punish sin with sin by "giving people up" to do whatever their perverse hearts want to do. Along the way Paul has highlighted what we might call the marquee sins of the Gentile world: gross idolatry and having unnatural sexual relations. All the while we can imagine that some among Paul's hearers might be responding with vigorous nods of agreement. Those who uphold proper moral standards—in particular the Jews—are saying to themselves, "That's right, Paul! Give it to them. Let those Gentiles have it! For their reckless behavior, they deserve every bit of God's wrath. They are worthy of condemnation! Paul has led them into a trap, and this trap he's about to snap shut.

1. Introduction

- ✓ Paul argues from problem to solution. All people need God's gift of righteousness because all people lack any righteousness in themselves.
- ✓ In the background, we need to hear Paul as a prosecuting attorney, making the case that God can righteously condemn of all people on the last day because people are all unrighteous sinners.
- ✓ One of the "boasts" of a Jew was that, of all the people in the world, it was his tribe and nation that had received the Torah (the Law). God had established his covenant with them by circumcision (2:17-20). For more, see Philippians 3:3-5. These advantages, they reasoned, would surely give them a favored place on the last day.

2. Study Romans 2:1-5

- ✓ What is Paul's basic charge here?
- ✓ How is "the one who passes judgment" guilty of sinning against both tables of the law?
- ✓ How can Paul possibly sustain the charge that "the one who passes judgment" is guilty of "doing the same things"?

- ✓ A/D—Unbelievers' common charge against Christians of hypocrisy is baseless.

3. Study Romans 2:6-13

The Law's Standard)

- ✓ Some people are troubled by this passage, wondering if Paul is saying, "People can be saved by keeping the law." Consider what Jesus said once to the lawyer who asked him how to be saved. Jesus asked him to recite the law. After the lawyer had done so, Jesus said, "Do this and you will live" (Lk 10:28).

Why did Jesus say this to him?

- ✓ Paul is just setting forth the law's standard here: this is how the law "works." Here he does not discuss whether or not anyone can meet that standard. That question he answers decisively in 3:20. See also Galatians 3:21 for a similar passage.

What is that standard?

4. Study Romans 2:14-24

A surprising advantage for a Gentile;

A surprising disadvantage for the Jew

- ✓ As said before, a Jew was apt to look with disdain upon Gentile nations: these were all “lesser breeds without the law”—how does Paul undercut the very basis for the Jew’s disdain in vv. 14-16?

- ✓ In vv. 17-24, how does Paul turn on its head the Jew’s boast, “We’ll be better off in the judgment than Gentile “sinners”! After all, we have the Law!”

- ✓ Reflect on the “damage” done by a public lapse of a well-known Christian or pastor. Who gets hurt?

5. Study Romans 2:25-29:

- ✓ What final Jewish “boast” does Paul remove here?

- ✓ “We have the law! We’re under the covenant of circumcision! Our God is the true God!”—all these boasts in the externals of religion are sadly repeated (in thought if not in word) by members of all religion, including us in WELS. How might you “update” Paul’s language to make it applicable to us in WELS?

6. Study Romans 3:1-8:

Paul answers some objections

- ✓ In your own words, paraphrase what the “Jewish objector” is saying.

- ✓ A/D—Paul uses reason and logic to refute these objections.

- ✓ What accusation is often made against us who believe we are saved by Christ’s righteousness alone?

For next time: read 3:9 to 4:25 “Justified by Faith Alone”