

Romans
Critical Moralizers
September 18, 2011
Rom. 2:1-16

I. Critical Moralizers

In verse 2:17, “you” is called Jew. In verses 2:1-16, the objects of Paul’s words can be Jews, but can also be appropriate to self-righteous Gentiles. Commentaries handle it both ways. My preference is to be broader since it encompasses the Jew anyhow. If we assume that it is for the Jew, then by extension, we can apply it to all anyway...therefore, ultimately, there is not a huge difference. Since it is not explicitly stated that 2:1-16 is aimed at the Jew, why add it to Scripture? Also, Paul uses the phrase “first for the Jew, then for the Gentile” twice in this section (in verses 9 and 10), which implies that this passage might also be aimed at Gentiles.

II. No Excuse for Passing Judgment: Rom. 2:1-4

Rom 2:1-4

2:1 You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. 2 Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. 3 So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? 4 Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?

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Both Luther and Augustine used the first verse to accuse rulers of having an inappropriate special standard for themselves but a different one for everyone else.

What is our basis for judging others? If it is because they transgress the law of God, we condemn ourselves because we also transgress the law of God:

James 2:10-11

10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. 11 For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

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The Bible is clear about judging others:

Matt 7:1-5

7:1 "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

3 "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

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Later in Romans, Paul would write:

Rom 14:12-13

12 So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

13 Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.

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We are not God; we do not have His capability or prerogatives; we should not try to do His job. If we do...guess what...we will fail.

Concerning verse 3, for a person to condemn others, even if correct in the condemnation, leaves the person open to being accused by others, including especially God. Basically, a person who finds faults in others is without excuse for the faults that reside in him, as in:

Luke 18:11

11 The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men — robbers, evildoers, adulterers — or even like this tax collector.

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Verse 4 is a great verse. What does it mean? Let's us suppose that someone judges others but yet do not see themselves being judged despite the evil they do. Such a violator should not identify God's lack of response as being weakness or, heaven forbid, think that God approves of it.

III. God's Judgment: Rom. 2:5-11

Rom 2:5-11

5 But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. 6 God "will give to each person according to what he has done." 7 To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. 8 But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. 9 There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; 10 but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. 11 For God does not show favoritism.

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Verse 5 It is difficult for the self-righteous person to repent, as in:

Prov 26:12

12 Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

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Ps 62:12

12 and that you, O Lord, are loving. Surely you will reward each person according to what he has done.

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Even though God might not react swiftly, He will react. When He does, and it might not be in this lifetime, they will be the recipient of God's wrath for all that they have done

Verse 7

“Doing good” is a byproduct of those who are in Christ.

“Perseverance of the Saints” states that a Christian will not fall (fully) away.

- Verse 9 Just as the cross is the power for all who are saved, so is the punishment for everyone who does evil.
- Verse 11 While the Jew might have thought that they were God's people and that the Gentiles were not, Paul points out that God's judgment shows no favoritism. "Favoritism" means "respector of persons."

Acts 10:34-35

34 Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism 35 but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.

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Col 3:25

25 Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism.

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Eph 6:9

9 And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

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James 2:1

2:1 My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism.

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IV. Other Sins: Rom. 2:12-16

Rom 2:16

12 All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. 13 For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. 14(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, 15 since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.) 16 This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

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- Verse 12 People will be judged by who they know. As 1:20 and 1:25 point out, people are called to worship. As verse 15 will point out, their laws are written on their hearts, if not on pieces of paper. Again, people are judged not for their lack of knowledge but rather for what they do know:

John 9:41

41 Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.

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- Verse 13 James puts it this way:

James 1:22-25

22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. 23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it — he will be blessed in what he does.

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Verse 14 When Paul says that they are “law for themselves,” he is not writing that they make up their own laws, but rather that somehow they have the access to God’s law within them. (Note: Verses 12-16 are sometimes used to make arguments that we can obey the law sufficiently to be able to come to God, but understanding this phrase makes this difficult position impossible.)

Verse 15 So, the Gentile has no excuse again for disbelief, because his heart (or conscience) will condemn him.

V. Two Additional Proofs of God

1. Inner need to belief in some kind of god (sometimes repackaged as the ethnological argument). Note the following verse:

Rom 1:25

25 For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever.

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Note also that Rom. 1:20 speaks to this as well. Throughout history, men have been compelled to believe in some kind of god or gods. Although there was an internet story that seemed unbelievable about a skeptic finding a tribe in Mongolia within the last decade that had no manifestation of belief in God in its history, no tribe, including this tribe, in all of history that can be verified to exist. Since all men’s ancestry traces back to one man (Adam) and one family (Noah’s), everyone has a record of the true God in his family history even if removed by many generations. The prevalence of continuing beliefs demonstrated throughout history and in all geographies—even if very poor reflections of the real God or only his “creatures”—show the strong inner need for men to be theistic in belief.

2. Acknowledgement of the God’s law (similar to the moral argument). Similar to the need to worship divine beings, man’s communities have acknowledged laws, whether written on paper or the heart. Usually these sets of laws start with a degraded reflection of God’s law. Note the following:

Rom 2:14-15

14 For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, 15 in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, NASU

The moral argument basically proposes that there must be some source of morality and that this source must be God. Paul’s use of laws is similar to the treatment of morality in such arguments, although somewhat broader.

In last week’s session, we discussed existence and design as proofs of God. These are probably better arguments (in my opinion) than the moral or internal-law arguments.