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Romans

...who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them. Romans 1:32

This is the last verse of chapter 1 and it sums up the discourse which began in verse 18. All that Paul has said since then shows that man is without excuse when God judges him. We can know enough about Him from the creation itself that we stand condemned when we go against what is right and obvious. We instinctively know about Him, and therefore we “know the righteous judgment” which will necessarily proceed from Him.

This judgment comes to those “who practice such things” as are described in verses 21-31 and which are “deserving of death.” This doesn’t mean that they will receive death, but that this is what is deserved. They are aware of it and thus it shows their guilt in continuing on in the face of the looming judgment. When His wrath is poured out, there will be no valid reason to speak against it. Every mouth will be stopped.

However, knowing this, they purposely fail in the things they should do and they intentionally act in the ways they shouldn’t. But Paul goes on to say that as if that wasn’t enough, they “not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.” In other words, they applaud as others take their perverted course. Sinful man doesn’t want to act alone in his sin, but he wants to make a

party of it. The common expression, “Come on, everybody does it” is what is being relayed here. Thus there is not only an expected hand of judgment, but it will be doubly just. They have looked for hell and have brought others along to join them.

All of this leads us back to what preceded this discourse on depravity. Paul’s words concerning the gospel can now be seen in a much clearer light –

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.”

The spiral of depravity justly deserves God’s punishment and condemnation, but God – who is rich in mercy – has granted a pardon to the fallen sons of Adam. He has meted out the punishment we deserve in His own Son, Jesus. By faith in that, we can be cleansed from our past sins and stand justified before our Creator. The gospel of Christ is “the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.” The choice is ours – stand condemned for the deeds committed in the flesh or to have them judged in God’s chosen Substitute. Heaven or hell waits for all people and there is only one way to heaven, through the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. Romans 2:1

In what is a masterpiece of subtlety, Paul now begins to address the Jews though he doesn’t specifically state as much until verse 17. The reason for this is to build an argument to such an extent that by the time he actually names them, they have no way to turn back and claim innocence.

The natural revelation of God has been given to all men (Romans 1:18-32) and condemns all, how much more than the very stewards of God's special revelation of Himself, the oracles of God, the temple, the glory? The Jews looked at the people around them as heathen and outside of the graces of God. This is perfectly evident from innumerable passages in the gospels. But Paul says that they are inexcusable when they judge because when they do, they merely condemn themselves. The very acts for which they find fault in others are found openly displayed in their own writings about themselves. These acts led to the Babylonian exile, further written condemnation after the exile, the crucifixion of Christ, and eventually the Roman dispersion.

To understand that this concept surely applies to all men, even the greatest and beloved of God, we will refer to 2 Samuel 12 and the pitiful story of David's great sin –

Then the Lord sent Nathan to David. And he came to him, and said to him: "There were two men in one city, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had exceedingly many flocks and herds. But the poor man had nothing, except one little ewe lamb which he had bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and with his children. It ate of his own food and drank from his own cup and lay in his bosom; and it was like a daughter to him. And a traveler came to the rich man, who refused to take from his own flock and from his own herd to prepare one for the wayfaring man who had come to him; but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him." So David's anger was greatly aroused against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this shall surely die! And he shall restore fourfold for the lamb, because he did this thing and because he had no pity. Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your keeping, and gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if that had been too little, I also would have given you much more! Why have you despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the people of Ammon. 2 Samuel 12:1-9

The “man after God’s own heart” coveted, committed adultery, and committed murder, and yet he was willing to condemn someone else for something far less serious. Such is the nature of sin in the human heart. It affects all people and it blinds each of us in a way that what we perceive in others often seems more wicked than what we ourselves have done, even when our actions may be much more heinous.

John 8:1-12 gives a similar example for us to consider. Take time today to read that passage and reflect on why the account is given as well.

Life application: It is true; the Jewish people of Paul’s time were actually more accountable for their actions because they had the Law and the Prophets to tell them what God specifically expected from mankind. As this is so, how much more accountable to God are we now that the New Testament is also written? The word is near to us, it is in our homes, on our computers, and broadcast on radio and TV. How can we escape God’s wrath if we neglect so great a salvation as is offered through Jesus? Read your Bible daily and then live out your life in accord with its precepts.

But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. Romans 2:2

“But we know” implies that it is perfectly understood by all. It is written on our minds as an undeniable truth. More so then is it understood by the Jews who had the written testimony of the history of the world and the repeated lessons which resulted from the disobedient heart of man. God’s word, maintained by them, holds one account after another of the judgment of God upon man’s disobedience.

This “judgment of God is according to truth.” This can be interpreted a couple ways. The first is that God’s judgment will truly come; it is inevitable based on our walking in a way contrary to His precepts. The second view, which is more likely correct, is that God’s judgment is based on the truth. In Him there is only holiness

and perfection. There is no unrighteousness and there is also nothing capricious or vindictive. His judgment is based upon His perfection and not some type of personal vendetta or arbitrary whim. People who feel this way about Him have never taken the time to deduce what God is like. Instead, they simply accuse Him of being as a cosmic bully or an uncaring Creator who allows innocent children to die for no sound reason. They are awash in their own myopic vision, dispelling any notion of an infinitely wise Creator.

God's judgment comes "according to truth against those who practice such things." All judgment is a result of sin and it is directed against the perpetrators of that sin. The list Paul gives in the previous chapter defines these things. But what about those who seem to be caught in judgment but haven't done anything wrong? There are two directions that must be considered. The first is that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23)." Sin came through Adam and all have inherited his fallen state. Therefore, no one can claim they are guilt-free. This is confirmed by Jesus' words in John 3:18 –

"He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already,..."

Man is condemned already and therefore there is no valid argument against God's judgment on any person. But secondly, some are taken away that are a part of the covenant community and have been cleansed of their past sins. Why has evil come upon them? The answer can be found in Isaiah 57:1 –

"The righteous perishes,
And no man takes it to heart;
Merciful men are taken away,
While no one considers
That the righteous is taken away from evil."

What we may perceive as some type of judgment may actually be God's grace in saving them from something worse which may occur. We don't have all the

information and therefore we must trust that what we don't see is still the right avenue and is based on His perfect knowledge.

Life application: When we look at the course of life, politics, world events, etc. we should attempt to see them in the larger scope of things and not have a myopic view of what is happening. When we relate everything that occurs around us to ourselves, we will never understand why things transpire and we will naturally take offense. But we... we are not the center of the universe. We are a small speck of God's immense plan which is being worked out for our good and for His glory. Keep this in mind and trust that He truly is in control.