

No Excuse, O Man!

Rom 2:1-4

The Gospel is about righteousness, said Paul back in 1:17. Paul says the gospel ministry is a ministry of righteousness in 2 Corinthians 3.9.

This means the Gospel addresses unrighteousness, sinfulness, godlessness, as in Romans 1:18-32. But the Gospel equally addresses self-righteousness as well as unrighteousness.

Something has been happening as we have been following Paul's description of the wrath of God on these things at the end of Romans 1. There is a crowd growing behind Paul. They are at first quiet and nodding their heads in agreement; and then they are saying 'amen' to each new line of God's judgment against these wicked and perverse things. And at the end, they are very excited – until Paul abruptly now, and bluntly says to them, **YOU ARE WITHOUT EXCUSE TOO!**

Notice how Paul switches here from the third person to the more pointed second person – from they, they, they in chapter 1; to you, you, you, in chapter 2.

Paul has somewhat led them into their comfort zone – judging others, condemning others – although they are guilty of doing the same sins.

Paul now springs the trap, beginning with his conclusion – Therefore you have no excuse, O man!

If those of Romans 1 are without excuse – so are you!

Romans 2 can be outlined as follows:

1-11 – no partiality with God – vs. 11; God’s judgment is according to truth, verse 2; according to what is right, without favoritism. This man believes in partiality or special privilege.

12-16 – no partiality runs right through both Jews and Gentiles – sinners acting without the law and sinners acting under the law.

17-29 – brings special application to the Jew and a lesson on what a true Jew is according to the Bible.

Who is this inexcusable O Man?

Some say this is a Gentile moralist at first, and that Paul goes to apply the matter to the Jew later on. There were Gentile souls, after all, who agreed very much with what Paul writes in Romans 1.

Some others find this O Man is really the Jew all along, that he is the hidden target. Murray says the strong criticism of others and the privileged defense fits well the attitude of a first century Jew, who made judgmentalism into a national pastime.

But if that is so, it seems then the Gentile moralist is out of the picture entirely here, and we know that Paul is driving to Romans 3 and the indictment upon the *whole* world.

The best way is a both/and answer. All moralists who are themselves guilty of what they condemn in others, fall under this chapter – to the Jew first and also the Greek.

There is a sneaking up on Paul’s Jewish kinsmen. They are being reeled in by not mentioning them by name. But to think that only Jews are guilty of deflecting their own sin by judging others is not universal enough.

Morality, self-righteousness, can blind anybody to their own sins while giving a keen view of the sins of others.

Our message then has two parts – the judgment of God upon the self-righteous in 1-3, and then an added dimension regarding abuse of the kindness of God.

Paul begins in verse 1 that **we are as much without excuse as the man of Romans 1 if you are the man of Romans 2.**

See a strong connection by the word ‘therefore’ between the two chapters, and the repetition of the word practice from 1:32.

The same word pops up three times in 1-3 – one in each verse.

Those who practice or do the same thing they judge in others, cannot escape the judgment of God themselves!

Here are two men – Romans 1 man and Romans 2 man – both know what God requires; both know such sins are wrong; one approves others doing such sins, and one does not. Quite the opposite, he rather sharply judges such people.

But both of them **do** what they know to be wrong!

Which one is worse off? Godet says, those who condemn others for sinning while sinning themselves, are to be condemned more than those who only commend sin.

The person who condemns others is condemning himself at the same time!

Verse 2 adds something which the Romans 1 sinner does not agree: that the judgement of God is right to fall upon those who practice sin. The judgment of God is according to truth. God is not unrighteous or

evil or false to inflict wrath. The Romans 1 sinner does not agree with this – he suppresses the truth of God’s rightful throne to judge his own sins.

The Romans 2 sinner agrees with this, but only partly. His own, identical sins are not judged! He makes an wrong conclusion that his own sins will be lightly passed over – even while judging others sharply for what they do.

So see two related truths in verse 2 – God’s judgment is certain + the knowledge or conviction of that judgment by God upon all sin.

Paul is very bold, courageous and certain here; and so may we be. Paul will go on in 5-6 to speak of this judgment day to come, so we can wait for that passage for now.

But don’t miss what is stated – that there is right place of making judgments of the sins of others.

The favorite verse of the world seems to be Matthew 7:1 – Do not judge! But we need to read as well John 7, where Jesus demands we make righteous judgments.

This Romans 2 man however is wrongly sharp to others because he is being soft on himself.

This brings us to verse 3 – read. Somehow passing criticism and judgmentalism on others acts like a shield to him and his sins – which are the same sins! He can see the speck in other people’s eyes but can’t see the plank of wood in his own!

So to others, his attitude is “judgmental”; to himself, “exceptional”!

His sword of justice and judgment, has only one edge pointing outward, and not two, with the first pointing inward.

He hits others with a hammer but his own sins are pounded with a pillow, if at all!

And there is an intimate relationship between these two, in spite of the internal inconsistency going on. The more he can judge others, the more relieved he will not be judged. Being sharp against others is believed to be his salvation.

The philosopher Thomas Hobbes observed that people are forced to keep themselves in their own favor by observing the imperfections of others. We sew together our suit of self-righteousness from the sins of others!

Verse 4 takes us further – using the good the Lord gives and turning them on their head – a reason for self-complacency instead of self-examination, repentance and change. We will see this in a moment.

But see here that for this self-righteous man Romans 2, his way out of Romans 1 is a fleshly answer, and one united to the Romans 1 man: neither of them is willing to judge themselves!

Isn't this what takes place so often today? So many attempt to sidestep their sin by a. not calling it sin, as the Romans 1 man, or b. by defending themselves that they are superior to others.

Let's face it: neither the unrighteous nor the self-righteous want to look in the mirror and see the truth about themselves!

And so we wind up relativists: "I'm ok, your ok."

But we are not ok.

John Gerstner shares an experience that illustrates this.

He was on a trip in Kashmir with his wife and returning from shopping in a boat, when some water splashed up on them from what seemed another vessel. The boat owner got very upset and Gerstner took notice how agitated he was becoming. As the man quickly came to the dock, he was growing even more angry and insisting everyone get off the boat. Gerstner tried to calm him down and say 'its ok'; it's only a little water! But the man was all the more furious, broke out of his dialect and responded in English, 'its NOT OK!' The Gerstners climbed up on the dock at the shore, and the angry man tossed his own grandchild up to the confused couple, and he climbed up out of the boat himself. When the Gerstners turned around from putting the child on the shore, the boat was gone. A hole had punctured the hull, and the strong undertow of the waters pulled it down into the depths, only to pop back up six boats away! If they had stayed on the vessel another few seconds, they would have gone down with it!

This is the message of these early chapters of Romans – I'm not ok! You're not ok. No one is ok! Until we turn to Christ, who knows we are not ok! He doesn't excuse us but pardons us. He forgives us dirty sinners! "I have come not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance!"

This is a passage that calls us to beware!

Beware of pride – pride that says my sins are not a big deal, but other peoples' are.

Beware of presumption – there is no faith going on here; just a presumption and presumption is not faith!

Beware of Phariseeism – that says, 'I have a "pass," that God is going to deal with my sins differently than other people's.' There is no refuge here says Paul, says Jesus, says the Bible, in this! No salvation in this way!

This brings us then to the 4th verse – read.

The riches of God’s good kindness and patience are being misread and misunderstood.

This is something both the unrighteous and self-righteous do. When good happens to an immoral person, it makes them think God doesn’t care how they live. When good happens to a self-righteous man, he uses it as a stamp of approval on his life.

Or flip the verse upside down. When bad things happen to you, what is your first response? Is it, “this evil to me is most appropriate; I am a fallen creature passing through a fallen world! Don’t I deserve far worse?”

Nope – it must be somebody else’s fault! Who is to blame for this? I am a victim and don’t deserve this kind of treatment.

So the tails of this coin means its somebody else’s fault; and when it comes up heads, that means I deserve the good I receive!

That’s what is going on in verse 4. The good he enjoys every day is proof of God’s smiling on him – as he frowns on others, but does the same evil he does!

Every day men believe a lie and ask: ‘why do bad things happen to good people?’ But reality speaks in this way: ‘why do good things happen to God’s enemies?’

Pride stands against humility and faith.

God’s kindnesses are intended to show tolerance and patience with hard hearts, while calling for conviction of sin, softening of heart, and repentance!

Let us look briefly at three points:

First, the *riches* of God’s kindness here: **God’s Riches**

Second, how man abuses these riches. **Pride's Refusal**

Third, the proper response – following God's lead: **Man's Repentance**

First of all, **God's Riches**. They are His riches, His kindness; the kindness or goodness of God.

Kindness is probably the better word, as it brings out the benevolent actions of the Lord. Plus there is another word for goodness.

Then the *tolerance* and *patience* explain the kindness of God. Whenever kindness is shown sinful man, it takes the Lord's tolerance and patience to do so, because we are not worthy.

Forbearance, or tolerance is God's disposition to restrain himself from instantly punishing sinners, says MacKnight. But it is a truce not a peace; temporary and not total. "Tolerance" is a good term because it keeps God's disapproval in place.

God is good and shows kindness to the just and the unjust. He is a most rich and generous God in creation, providence and salvation.

"Riches" is a favorite word with Paul. Here is a sample:

Romans 9:23 to make known **the riches of His glory** upon vessels of mercy, (Rom 9:23) **Philippians 4:19** And my God shall supply all your need according to **His riches in glory by Christ Jesus**. (Phi 4:19) **Colossians 1:27** to make known what is **the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory**. (Col 1:27) **Romans 11:33** Oh, the depth of the riches **both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!** (Rom 11:33) And my favorite preach among the Gentiles **the unsearchable riches of Christ**, (Eph 3:8).

Talk about the true prosperity gospel!

What a wealth of goodness surrounds every man, woman and child. Take this to heart, that God is attached to all these kindnesses in your life. We treat his gifts like a box of toys tossed into the world, disconnected from him.

But that is not the case. That is not the case at all!

William Jay reminds us how much we owe him yet forget him.

His **greatness** enhances his tolerance and patience – we are little creatures of yesterday bringing offense to an eternal Maker; His **knowledge** enhances his kindness – none of our secrets are hid from him; all of them are open to His eye yet still he is good to us; His **holiness** enhances His patience – He cannot even look upon iniquity, but hates your sin; His **power** enhances it – when somebody offends us, we don't avenge often because we cannot do so, but not God – there is no defense His hand cannot pluck down. A look is all He needs. And his **bounty** enhances His loving forbearance. If someone was as dependent on you and served you with such ingratitude, how injured you would be.

This leads us to the second point here: **Pride's Refusal**.

These riches are abused to an unintended purpose, but they are purposely misread and mistreated.

The word here is variously translated: *presume, despise, think lightly, or show contempt*.

There is presumption here that believes somehow God will be more lenient on them than on others. But there is more – for this is rejecting the divine implication, that these things ought to bring you repentance. That is where despising God himself comes in.

So what is going on here? That these riches should pull a man away from sin, to powerfully lead him to repent.

It is an abuse of mercy or longsuffering to twist it to mean God accepts my sins, or, which is much the same, he accepts me just the way I am.

Their “not knowing” does not excuse their sin but increases it, and makes them inexcusable, all the more guilty.

Lead does not mean merely point, but to conduct us to a desired end. It is the same word as in **Romans 8:14** For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. These divine gifts are trying to lead in this direction, but it is not accomplishing it.

Instead, this inexcusable man is forcefully turning the wheel backwards – to protect himself *from* repentance; to hold on to his sins.

It is monstrous; he is in the same boat as the Romans 1 man, refusing to glorify or thank God, so the Romans 2 man refuses to be led to repent. Neither will be shaken out of a self-satisfied sinful state.

As the next verse says, it is the opposite of being in a safe condition. The sinner of verse 4 believes he has a huge bank account to go on writing checks from in rebellion to God, but he is in fact running up a debt he can never repay.

How then do we escape this knot?

We come to **Man’s Repentance**, and touch on the proper response to God’s lead, to God’s Riches, which Pride Refuses.

Repentance is not mere remorse or feeling bad about our sinfulness.

It is not a one-time event, and it is all over – it is all the lifelong; Calvin called it a reformation of the whole life according to the Law of God.

And repentance is not a standalone action, but is related to and dependent upon faith; our faith is always a *penitent* faith and repentance is always a *believing* repentance.

Solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. (Act 20:21 NAU)

So see that it is not only the badness of sin which should draw us to cross, but the kindness and grace of God in Jesus draws us there as well.

If God is willing to halt and postpone His immediate judgment on sin as it deserves, this shows something in the Lord regarding his reluctance to deal with us according to our sins.

Yet for all of this, repentance is still no easy or pleasant thing. Repentance is rightly called the Syrup of Ipecac of the soul: it induces vomiting to expel poison.

“Repentance is no fun at all. It is something harder than merely eating humble pie. It means unlearning the self-conceit and self-will that we have been training ourselves into for thousands of years.” CS Lewis

Lewis portrays a boy in his Narnia tales named Eustace, who becomes a dragon because of his sin; in order to become a boy again, he must have the dragon skin pulled off – not once, but many, many times!

What is repentance? Ryle says: “True repentance begins with knowledge of sin. It goes on to work sorrow for sin. It leads to confession of sin before God. It shows itself before man by a thorough breaking off of sin. It results in producing a habit of deep hatred for all sin.”

Repentance is in the whole man – the mind, the heart, the will, the actions.

Oh let us be moved by such kind and tender acts of God to flee to him, to turn from our ways to God's ways! How welcoming he is of even the worst sinners!

What a word we have in the Isaiah 55 – the invitation chapter of the OT!

This chapter begins so warmly!

"Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in abundance."

Then it goes on in this Godlike way:

⁶ Seek the LORD while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near. ⁷ Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the LORD, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. ⁸ "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. ⁹ "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts. (Isa 55:6-9)

What heavenly ways, contrary to man's thoughts and ways, are the ways of the gospel!

But know this: If the kindness of God does not woo us, as with the bands of love, to come to Christ, then the strong winds of God's just wrath may be used to awaken you from your slumbers.

And that is what is before us in Romans 2:5 and following for next week.