

Romans Ch2

Introduction

Romans is the greatest systematic treatise in which Paul expounds his beliefs and teaching. This is the epistle that has furnished us with great terms like justification, salvation, redemption, sanctification by the Spirit.

There is no point preaching the Gospel till men are convinced they need it. In 1:18-3:20 we are told that all are sinners, and all are under judgement. All need salvation. Paul had already made this point in chapter 1. Men, especially Gentiles, have despised God's revelation in nature, ungrateful, stooping to the very depths. The whole of mankind is morally bankrupt, and hence subject to God's wrath. True even now when God gives men up to their sins.

To this condition comes the good news that the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. Many Jews who would have heard Paul preaching like this would have heartily agreed. They had been saying it all along, and saying that the Gentiles who lived appalling lives were of course under God's condemnation. God was going to blast the heathen out of existence for their sins. But they did not think it was true of the Jews, with their privileged position in God's sight. His chosen people had special protection of God. They believed that God would judge the Gentiles with one measure, the Jews with another.

So, these Jews are now dealt with by Paul. They were making a disastrous mistake, for judgement is to come on all, with no exceptions. Jews in practice were no better than the Gentiles. If the Jews had special privileges, that was to move them more quickly to repentance. There is a word here for everyone who thinks God will deal with him differently from everyone else, who trusts in himself that he is righteous, and despises others. There is a word to those who profess to teach others, about their own consistency. There is a word here to remind us that the goodness and kindness of God is to lead us to salvation.

A Universal Judgement

The average Jew could not for one moment contemplate the possibility of himself and his fellow countrymen being subject to condemnation. Hence no need for Gospel of Christ with its message of salvation from judgement. So Paul rebukes arrogance and shows that Jews have no superiority. God has one standard for all. The man who agrees with Gentile condemnation is really condemning himself because he is guilty in other direction and without excuse. There is no point in hiding one's own guilt by judging others.

God's judgement is according to truth and therefore is absolutely impartial. There is no immunity for nobles. No hushing up, so that great men may escape, because no-one can escape. There is no favouritism with God. In international agreements there may be "favoured nations clauses", but no such category is known in God's economy. In fact, the more privileges given to any people, the more severity in judgement will

be felt. **Render to every man according to his deeds** (2:6). The state of man's heart is revealed in the kind of life he lives and character he has. Some will receive eternal life if their heart is set on goodness and immortality. For others who do not obey truth, there will be indignation and wrath. Note there is no middle pathway, men are on one side or the other.

Just as salvation is offered to Jews first, so judgement will be meted out to Jews first. Then judgement will fall on Gentiles. They may not have had the revelation of God's law through Moses but are still liable to judgement. They have had their consciences to give them a measure of right and wrong. Judgement will be according to the light they have.

Both Jews and Gentiles to be brought face to face with Christ and Gospel in ultimate judgement. In the last day, the judgement will be so searching and probing that even the secrets (the best evidence of man's condition) of men will be known and made known to all. Also, the hidden motives behind good deeds will be revealed. Nothing is more certain than that judgement is coming, and all are to be included. It will be utterly fair and just, a meticulous and detailed examination of character as evidence of relationship with God. The rewards are going to be generous and eternal. Doom is going to be certain and terrible. Thank God there will be a judgement day. No cause for our condemning others, for in doing so we are merely condemning ourselves. Beware of "This cannot happen to me". The more light, the more condemnation if we don't use that light. This is a warning while there is still time to repent and seek the Lord.

Precept of John Wesley when training his evangelists – in unfolding his message, it was his practice to speak first in general of love of God to men. Then with all possible energy to preach law of holiness and so search conscience to its depths. Then, and not until then, to uplift glories of Gospel of pardoned life. These directions follow lines laid down by Paul in Romans.

We who claim to be believers – saved by grace – need to ask ourselves, is there the evidence in our lives? Our works and character will be final test of judgement. Faith not producing these is useless. God is eternally in earnest when he promises and threatens.

Note the stress on works in every epistle that emphasises grace in salvation. Luther said "It is a living, creative, active, mighty thing, this faith. So it is possible for faith to produce good works steadily". Calvin said "It is faith alone which justifies, but faith which justifies can never be alone".

A Severe Condemnation

To Jew this warning of universal judgement must have been shattering. They were quite sure of God's special favour because of their descent from Abraham and because of the badge of circumcision in their faith. So Paul points out that Jewishness is nothing to do with circumcision but a matter of character. Therefore many so-called Jews, descended from Abraham, are not really Jews at all because of the way those Jews lived their lives. In this section there is proof beyond all question that the Jews had failed to keep the law of which they constantly boasted.

Five Jewish privileges - resting in the law, glorying in God, knowing his will, approving things that are excellent, instructed out of law (2:17-18). Five more claims – guide to the blind, light to those in darkness, corrector of foolish, teacher of babes, have knowledge and truth in law (2:19-20). But in all these privileges, they had failed to live up to them.

You who teach others – teach yourself also? Preach not to steal – do you steal? Say there is to be no adultery – do you commit adultery? Abhor idols – do you commit sacrilege? (2:21-22). They boast of the law, but dishonour God by breaking it. Despite all boasting of religion, they are bringing discredit on religion they profess. Then the climax – their conduct is the very reason the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles. “Like God, like people”, “If that is being a Christian...”

Because Jewish privileges are useless, indeed bring greater condemnation, if there is no personal righteousness, the Jew is no better than Gentile – indeed in a worse position and a more dangerous one. The real issue is not outer circumcision but circumcision of the heart. The real matter is not whether men praise us but whether we have God’s approval.

So Paul points out the danger of religion without reality. Nothing is easier than self-deception and self-righteousness in religion. The more we know, the greater the danger of presuming on privileges and being content with more nominal Christianity, and knowing no change of heart. Occupied with Christian work, associated with Christian people, know religious phrases etc, yet all the while know no change of heart through the Holy Spirit. Compare **Many will say to me in that day Lord, Lord have we not prophesied in thy name?.. cast out devils?....done wonderful works?... will I profess unto them I never knew you, depart from me, ye that work iniquity** (Matthew 7:20-21). Not everyone who calls him Lord, Lord – but those who do the will of the Father in heaven. The greater the privilege, the greater the peril.

Also solemn warning here for those who teach and preach in God’s name, who stand up as guide, light, corrector, instructor and possessor of knowledge and truth. Do we do what we exhort others to do? The peril of the teacher is consciousness – carping, fault-finding, judging, looking down on others, complaining if they don’t reach proper standard. But what about own life and standards? His inconsistency dishonours God, and leads people to reject Gospel. This also applies to those who profess Christ and witness to him. Do men think less of God because we are among them?

A Solemn Warning

Jews have no ground for feeling superior. Privileges will not save them. In fact, privileges will only bring greater condemnation. Finally, privilege should have moved them to repent of their sins.

Why do you despise the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long-suffering? Don’t you know that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? (2:4). The Jews thought God’s special mercy was an invitation to sin. They were

trading on God's love. Heine was made famous by his cynical remark, not worrying about the world to come – “God will forgive – c'est son metier – that's his business”.

Think of God's goodness in temporal things. Food and clothing, comforts and luxuries, good health and vigour of mind, happiness of home and family life, the misfortunes of many have passed us by. How different our lives would be in some countries or in some families. Jesus asked **“Many good works have I shewn you from my father, for which of those works do you stone me?”** (John 10:32)

Think again of Christ, of the thousands of times you have heard the Gospel, of your living in a land of the open Bible. Think of how God has borne with us, patiently, though we have sorely provoked him. Yet there is not one reason why God should tolerate us one minute longer. God is great enough to deal with us, and he knows enough about us so that we are without a single excuse for our impertinence.

Why do we despise his forbearance? Have we forgotten, would we rather not think about it? Why do we never thank him for it? Dare we do so? His goodness calls us to repent. He leads us to repent. It's as though he pull us by the sleeve and “Come this way. Why do you despise and hate me, what wrong have I done? I have done you a thousand good turns, why not turn and repent and trust?”. If he has thus loved and spared us, and pleads with us, we may be sure he is willing to accept our repentance. If he leads us to repent, He will surely help us. If we were in God's place, could we bear to be treated the way we have treated him?

Conclusion

- Judgement is real.
- The reality of our lives is going to be tested.
- See all the blessings of our earthly life as a reason to seek the Lord now.