

## Romans 1:32-2:5

## A collective rebellion against God (1:32)

### Relying on your own righteousness (2:1-5, part 1)

#### 1:32 A collective rebellion against God

For the third time Paul underlines human responsibility for wrong doing,

*Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death...*

Even if we have been sinned against, we are still all responsible for our own shortcomings. Accepting this can be hard, but it is essential if we want to enter into the abundant life Jesus offers. Alcoholics Anonymous always introduce themselves at their meetings, "My name is so-and-so, and I am an alcoholic." They know about the power of personal confession (see also John 3:19-21).

But in 1:32, love of the darkness is not only personal, but also collective,

*... they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.*

We think, "Everyone is doing it, so it must be ok!" But, as Augustine of Hippo declared, "Right is right even if no one is doing it; wrong is wrong even if everyone is doing it."

We are constantly told the world is changing, but the Bible says the world in its present form is passing away. But the word of our God endures forever! It takes courage to stand against the flow. But we have a great advantage: we are guided by God's word, led by His Holy Spirit and guaranteed the promise of eternal life.

#### 2:1-16 People who rely on their own righteousness

2:1-5 (part 1)            God's judgment is based on truth

2:6-11 (part 2)        God's judgment is impartial

2:12-16 (part 3)      God's judgment is according to the light received

#### 2:1-5 (part 1)            God's judgment is based on truth

**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.*

Who is the "you" (singular) Paul is addressing? Imagine someone is preaching and describing human wickedness in a similar way to Paul in chapter one. There will be those listening and nodding in agreement. They hang on his every word. Paul then pauses, and says, *You therefore, have no excuse!*

He has in mind an imaginary person who thinks they are all right (the moralist). It is like when Nathan the prophet visited King David (which was not imaginary), and used a parable to expose David's sin (see 2Samuel 12:1-7). David was self-righteously indignant, but Nathan said, "You are the man!"

There would have been plenty of people in the first century who felt Paul's list of vices didn't apply to them, e.g. the Stoic philosophers. They believed it was possible to live a moral life without God. F.F. Bruce suggests that someone like Seneca (a leading Stoic and contemporary of Paul,) may have said something like,

*"Yes, I can see that is perfectly true of great masses of mankind, and I agree with the judgment which you pass on them – but there are others, of course like me, like yourself, who deplore these tendencies as much as you do."*

Yet it is well documented that Seneca wasn't as virtuous as he claimed to be! God knows all about us. When we look into the mirror of Paul's vices we will see something of ourselves – if we are honest.

**2:2** *Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth.*

God's judgment is based on truth because God knows. Only God knows if the Queen supports Brexit, because she's not about to tell (Hebrews 4:13)! God is a God of truth. A Christian journalist, Peter Hitchens, said this week, '*... the problem of all Godless ethical systems [meaning ours]... is that they rely on the appearance of goodness rather than on the inner heart seen only by God.* He continued, *"This is why I get into so much trouble when I say, quite candidly, that morality is about how you behave when you think nobody is watching. People really dislike hearing this, because they know in their hearts that it is absolutely true."*

Even those who try to live moral lives fall short of God's standards.

**2:3** *So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape the judgment of God?*

Now, Paul's imaginary good person will say, "Well, yes, I've lived a good life. I think I deserve to go to heaven."

Paul just 'replies' with another question,

**2:4** *Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realising that God's kindness leads you towards repentance?*

We misunderstand God if we think God not judging us quickly means we are blameless. Rather he gives us time to repent. There will be a final judgment, based on truth, for us all [Hebrews 9:27]. But will we repent?

**2:5** *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.*

What are we storing up for ourselves? Wrath or treasure? And what kind of heart do we have? [Jeremiah 16:12]. We all need our hearts softened by God's love and melted by His grace. We need a spiritual heart transplant, which is the heart of the gospel: *for in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last* [Romans 1:17].

Ezekiel put it like this,

**Eze 36:26-27** *And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*