



Romans 2:1-16

THE CONDEMNATION OF THE MORALIST

Paul uncovers in these verses a strange human foible, namely our tendency to be critical of everybody except ourselves. We are often harsh in our judgment of others as we are lenient towards ourselves. We work ourselves up into a state of self-righteous indignation over the disgraceful behavior of other people, while the very same behavior seems not nearly so serious when it is ours rather than theirs. We even gain a vicarious satisfaction from condemning in others the very faults we excuse in ourselves. Thomas Hobbes, the 17th century philosopher, wrote of people who “are forced to keep themselves in their own favor by observing the imperfections of other men.” This device enables us simultaneously to retain our sins and our self-respect. It is a convenient arrangement, but also both slick and sick.

—John Stott (1921-2011)

In Romans 1:18-32, Paul diagnosed what was wrong with the world. Humanity has rejected God and refused to give Him thanks, setting up their own gods and following their own desires and lusts. But what about those who live relatively good lives? Is everyone really under God’s judgment?

In Romans 2:1-16, Paul engages in a *diatribē*, a debate with an opponent who is arguing against his message.

*Therefore,
you are
inexcusable,
O man, whoever you are who judge.*

EXCUSE #1 — “I am not as bad as so-and-so.” (2:1-2)

The Myth of _____

The Reality: God’s judgment is based on the _____.

EXCUSE #2 — “God is lovingly tolerant of my sin.” (2:3-5)

The Myth of _____

The Reality: God’s judgment is full of His _____.

The greatest of faults, I should say, is to be conscious of none.

—Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881)

Most people, when directly confronted by evidence that they are wrong, do not change their point of view or course of action but justify it even more tenaciously. Even irrefutable evidence is rarely enough to pierce the mental armor of self-justification.

—Carol Tavris & Elliot Aronson

Every vice has its excuse ready.

—Publilius Syrus (85-43 BC)

Inexcusable. Grk, *anapologetos*, “without defense; to be unable to talk oneself out of difficulty.”

Projection is the unconscious process by which an individual attributes to another the desires, impulses or ideas that he finds unacceptable in himself.

—Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology

[We] think to bribe divine justice by protesting against sin and exclaiming loudly upon others that are guilty, as if preaching against sin would atone for the guilt of it. —Matthew Henry

EXCUSE #3 — “God will cut me some slack.” (2:6-11)

The Myth of _____

The Reality: God judges impartially based on our _____

*The heart is deceitful above all things,
And desperately wicked;
Who can know it?
I, the Lord, search the heart,
I test the mind,
Even to give every man according to his ways,
According to the fruit of his doings. (Jeremiah 17:9-10; cf. Prov. 24:12)*

Different Interpretations of Romans 2:6-11:

1. Paul is contradicting his own message of salvation by faith.
2. Paul is talking about Christians who live out their salvation by works.
3. Paul is talking about rewards in heaven, not about salvation.
4. Paul is speaking hypothetically of someone perfectly keeping the law.

EXCUSE #4 — “I didn’t know.” (2:12-15)

The Myth of _____

The Reality: God’s judgment is based on our _____.

EXCUSE #5 — “C’mon, I haven’t done anything that bad.” (2:16)

The Myth of _____

The Reality: God’s judgment is totally _____.

There is no creature hidden from His sight but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account. (Heb. 4:13)

Our Three Options: 1) Live a perfect life. 2) Face God’s wrath.
3)

*While therefore Thou dost chasten us; Thou scourgest our enemies a thousand times more.
—Book of Wisdom 12:22*

If righteousness be sought from the law, the law must be fulfilled; for the righteousness of the law consists in the perfection of works. —John Calvin (1509-64)

*You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.
—Jesus (Matt. 5:48)*

It is a continual seeking after eternal rewards, accompanied by a persistent doing of what is good, that is the condition for a positive verdict at God’s judgment. ...While, therefore, one could be justified by doing the law in theory, in practice it is impossible. —Douglass Moo

*The ground of judgment is their works; the rule of judgment is their knowledge.
—Charles Hodge (1797-1878)*

*Human beings are moral beings by creation. Not only do we experience an inner urge to do what we believe to be right, but we also have a sense of guilt and remorse when we have done what we know to be wrong.
—John Stott*

*Every man knows thoughts of himself that he would not tell to his dearest friend.
—Samuel Johnson (1709-84)*

*Self-justification and judging others go together, as justification by grace and serving others go together.
—Dietrich Bonhoeffer*