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POTHOLES IN THE ROAD

Romans 2:1-16

Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly...

Matthew 7:5

Towards the end of chapter one (1:28-31), Paul depicted a horrible picture of the sin of the heathen world, showing its condemnation as well as its punishment. As he wrote those words, Paul must have been aware many would be standing with him, shouting 'Amen' as the picture was completed. Now he turns to those people and in effect says to them, *You are just as guilty as the heathen*. Ouch.

The first and last verses in this section provide a contrast: Paul starts out with man on the throne of his own judgment and ends with God on the throne of judgment, just as it should be. Thus the key to this section will be judgment.

NOTE: A hypocrite is defined as a person who says one thing but does another. As such, a hypocrite is not limited to nationality, political persuasion, or religious affiliation... see 2:9-11

THE MORAL MAN & HIS OWN JUDGMENT 2:1

Five times in the first verse Paul uses the term *thou*. He wants his readers to know there is no ambiguity...he is speaking directly to each individual. Paul is dead serious about the self-righteousness of moral men and their hypocrisy.

Thou that judgest Those who are guilty of sin and unfamiliar with the Bible like to use the excuse, 'judge not, that ye be not judged.' (Matthew 7:1-5) Consequently, they reason any indictment of right or wrong is reserved only for God. But that is not true. It is necessary to have the capacity to discern right from wrong and to point out the difference. According to Paul, those who *judge* are not being condemned because they distinguish right from wrong but because they judge motives.

Thou condemnest thyself It is not sinful to discern between right and wrong. Paul was not condemning the moral judgments of men, but the fact they were guilty of the same things they were blaming on the heathen. Because the hypocrite had agreed to the standard, he condemned himself by being involved in the same actions (2 Samuel 12:1-7). In other words, moral judgments are good and necessary, but they must be applied to our own lives before they are enforced on others.

> **John 7:24**
> Judge not according to the appearance,
> but judge righteous judgment.
>
> *cf* Luke 18:10-14

NOTE: To the church at Corinth, Paul spoke further about this spiritual discernment and its impact on the body of Christ

> 1 Corinthians 5:12-13

Thou doest the same things At first, this seems hard to believe. Having seen the picture Paul painted of the heathen, and even been in full agreement with his assessment, how could any moral person be guilty of the same sins?

> They may not have done *all* the things listed in 1:29-31; certainly the heathen were guilty of being covetous, envious, and boastful...things even a moral person would be guilty of yet might not consider to be sinful.
>
> While guilty of these things, a moral person might not do them *outwardly* but *inwardly*. Paul hints at this in verse 16: 'God shall judge the secrets of men.' In 2 Corinthians 7:1, Paul identifies sins of the spirit as well as of the flesh. Whether outwardly manifested or done in the heart makes no difference: sin is sin (Jesus said as much in Matthew 5:27-28).

In either sense, the moral man is sinning against a flood of light: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God...(1:21). These men were doing in their own lives the very things of which they disapproved.

Thou art inexcusable This indictment would prove to be doubly true. Sin committed by anyone makes them guilty. But the guilt is heightened by their morality; by their own ability to know right from wrong.

NOTE: The word *inexcusable* is the same Greek word translated as *without excuse* in 1:20, meaning 'without a defense'

In 1:32, Paul pointed out that the heathen consented or *applauded* the evil deeds of others. In other words, they knew sin brought death, yet they approved of those sins and chose to do them anyway. On the other hand, the hypocrite *knows* sin is wrong, he *confesses* it is wrong, and still does it anyway.

Paul began his argument by turning the judgment of the moral man against himself. Now, he will turn the judgment of God against him as well.

NOTE: Beware...some see in this passage a proof text for salvation by works (verse 7)...the key word is *seek*. In fact, Paul is not showing men how to be saved, but rather, showing them why they are lost. Because of this, there is no gospel in this section.

THE MORAL MAN & GOD'S JUDGMENT 2:2-16

Having shown how moral men condemn themselves by doing those things they know to be wrong, Paul now shows the hypocrite he is guilty by God's standards, too. In doing so, Paul will show four great principles concerning the judgment of God:

The judgment of God is according to truth Absolute justice can only be realized in light of absolute truth. Those on the witness stand, who *swear* to tell the whole truth but do not, only serve to break down the system. God offers no loopholes or excuses to those who choose not to obey Him.

Note: Paul hints at the fact all people have an understanding of God and His absolute truth when he says 'but we are sure…'

In light of this knowledge, Paul goes on to illustrate the moral man's attitude toward God:

verse 3 thinkest Since these moral men knew God's judgment was according to truth, how are we to explain their attitude in continuing in sin? The word he used is *logizomai*, meaning 'to take inventory; to reason thoroughly.' Paul says it is their false reasoning: 'Did you *think* you would somehow escape the judgment of God? Any man who does so is a victim of his own faulty logic.

verse 4 despisest If one does not think this way, there is only one other alternative...to despise the goodness of God. The phrase *not knowing* does not mean the man is absolutely ignorant but rather, he ignores the mercy God pours out.

NOTE: In God's *goodness*, He **holds forth** His grace; in God's *forbearance*, He **holds back** His wrath.

verse 5 treasurest Either way, a man who reasons this way is depositing wrath for himself in the future. Christ encouraged believers to lay up for themselves treasures in Heaven (Matthew 6:20). In the same manner, all men are 'sending things ahead.'

Matthew 12:36
But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.

That God has not punished sinners for over two thousand years, that He has not broken through the heavens and struck men down, because God has not brought a judgment on the whole world since the flood has led men to draw a false conclusion from this delay. They are concluding God will never punish sin because He is now silent. They ought to learn from this that God is longsuffering, that He is 'not willing that any should perish' (2 Peter 3:9). That is what they ignore: 'Not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.' From the silence of God, men draw wrong conclusions.

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Psalm 50:21
These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.