

PRESUMED INNOCENT

Introduction

1. Judging others is a favorite sport for many. We do it all the time. We walk into a room and compare. If we compare favorably, we might stay and engage those who are present. If not, we may choose to leave. We not only make physical comparisons, but we also make judgments about character. Usually we place ourselves favorably, often near the top, certainly rarely less than average.
2. Let's review where I think Paul is going with this letter. If we have a simple map, we will not as likely get lost in the journey. In the first three chapters, Paul is building a case to prove that no matter how good we may think we are or what group we may belong to, we are sinners, lost, in desperate need of the intervention of God – our only hope is found in His mercy. Before Paul can tell us about the good news of God's mercy, he must prepare us with the bad news concerning God's judgment. We will never seek God's mercy, until we see ourselves as destitute. We will only long for eternal life, if we know we are spiritually dead.
3. To help us understand what Paul is saying, I want to share with you a little parable. It comes from Max Lucado's book, *In the Grip of Grace*. (Parable of the River, from Lucado, *In the Grip of Grace*, pp. 1-7). Five sons ... oldest stayed with the Father. One - hut-building hedonist - chapter 1; Fault-finding judgmentalist - chapter 2:1-16; Rock-stacking legalist (2:17-3:20) and the Grace-receiving believer (3:20-25).
4. Over the past few weeks, we have considered the "brother" described by Lucado as the hedonist. This is the person who has basically decided that life is short, so the ultimate goal is personal satisfaction. God does not matter. Forget God – at least the one revealed in Scripture. Do what you want. Forget worship. Indulge your desires. Instead of acknowledging God; be your own god. We discovered that God allowed them to become the victims of their own passions. But they will discover that they will have no excuse when they stand before God at the judgment.
5. Today we begin our observation of the "faultfinding judgmentalist." This is the guy who is sure that he is better than those whom he has decided to watch as he records their misdeeds. The faultfinding judgmentalist would no doubt have given a hearty "Amen"

to what we have said about the hedonist. We can see him now, smugly thinking, "I don't hate God. I am not full of murder or wickedness or evil schemes. In fact I am quite spiritual!" This could be anyone. There are many candidates in the religious world that would make such claims. But here Paul has in mind the self-righteous Jews who thought they were much better than their pagan Gentile neighbors referenced in chapter one. But are they? God says no. Paul records God's assessment in the first five verses of chapter 2.

I. NO EXCUSE – GUILTY (Paul makes this assessment based on a comparison with God's character). Paul begins with the declaration that...

A. God is just

1. While the Gentiles would hardly agree with this assessment, the Jews would at least give lip service to the justice of God. Often they would cry out for God to bring His justice against their enemies and to apply His justice to them as they presumed themselves to be worthy to receive the favor of God.
2. They would have been cheering what was said in chapter 1. I can hear it now! "Yeah! Preach it, Paul! These Gentiles are heathens. They deserve God's strictest judgment. God is right to give them over to their own passions! Right on, Paul! Let them have it! We love it when you preach this way! Yeah!"
3. We are always ready for the justice of God when it comes to the other guy! "It serves him right. You reap what you sow! That will teach him!" You get the idea. That was the attitude of the pious Jews as they considered the wickedness of the Gentiles. They were not counting on the content of this chapter, however! For God was about to speak of them as well. And what He had to say was not good.

B. You are guilty

1. Passing judgment on others sets the standard and it does not grant special dispensation. By declaring the Gentiles guilty, they were actually condemning themselves. When we judge others we obviously have a criterion by which we judge. In other words, we have some idea at least of what is right and what is wrong. As we establish that in our judgment we then are also bound to it. And if we are guilty of the same things we are accusing others, we have indicted ourselves! The problem was not in judging, but in judging and then practicing the same things that were judged as worthy of God's justice.

2. So, the reason for the condemnation was that the Jews were practicing the very things that they condemned in the Gentiles. It would be something like this. Suppose someone had been arrested for possession of cannabis. He goes before the judge and the judge is about to pass judgment on this person. As he is ready to render his verdict, he lights up a joint, takes a couple of puffs and then declares the person guilty as charged! The accused and the defense attorney and the observers in the courtroom would be ready to riot. It was time to move this to a higher court for appeal! The judge has no right to such a double standard! In this little parable, the Gentiles are the accused and the judge represents the Jews. Paul has nailed them. "You have no excuse", he says, " because you, the judge, practice the very same things as those whom you are judging."
3. But the pious Jew would surely protest, "They are the pagans. We are the good religious people! They deserve judgment. We deserve favor! How can we be guilty?" (Donald Grey Barnhouse paraphrased this verse as follows, "You dummy – do you really figure that you have doped out an angle that will let you go against God and get away with it? You don't have a ghost of a chance...There is no escape...and this means you, the respectable person sitting in judgment upon a fellow creature and remaining unrepentant yourself"). Not only are you without excuse, guilty, but also for you there is...

II. **NO ESCAPE - CONDEMNED** (They stood condemned with no escape because of their presumption in three matters).

A. Presume a double standard

1. Many would assume, based upon assessment of themselves or their heritage or their assumed value to society or their piousness or something like that, that they are exempt from God's justice. In other words, we want God's justice applied to everyone else, but not to us. He should overlook any flaws we may have because we somehow are deserving of His favor. We should get a pass.
2. But Paul would argue, "Not so!" as he continued his analysis reminding us that there is no partiality with God. Justice means that He will always do what is appropriate and there will not be special favors granted based on something we are or something we have accomplished or someone we know, etc.

3. The Jews could never argue with God using the line, "Do you know who I am?" But they tried it all the time – and so do we! We may presume it, but there is no double standard with God. That is why there is no escape. That is why we stand condemned.

B. Presume some special treatment

1. Could the Jews successfully use the argument of special treatment? After all, were they not God's chosen people? Did they not inherit a certain favor from God? Were they not set apart from the world as God's own possession? (I read somewhere that some Jews taught that Abraham sat outside the gates of hell in order to prevent even the most wicked Jew from entering. Second Century Justin Martyr recorded a Jewish opponent saying, "They who are of the seed of Abraham according to the flesh shall in any case, even if they be sinners and unbelieving and disobedient towards God, share in the eternal kingdom"). Do you see what Paul was up against here in relation to their presumed special treatment?
2. It is true that to some there are granted certain privileges. The Jews certainly knew some of those privileges. Paul will revisit this truth in chapter 3. But privilege itself does not grant permission to disobey the will of God without consequence.
3. If we do the same things, we will be judged the same way. God does not overlook our sin.

C. Presume innocence

1. Jesus' parable of the sinner and the Pharisee praying in the temple provide a classic illustration of what is happening here in Romans 2. You know the story. Listen to it from **Luke 18:9-14**.
2. The Gentiles were guilty of the things the Pharisee charged the tax collector. But the dirty little secret was that those same sins were resident in the hearts of the Jews (and in us). God is just and His just judgment will not only come to so called pagans who live in sin, but also to moral, religious people who can't stand pagans, though they do many of the same things that demonstrate their lack of trust in God and their lack of love toward God. The sin list in Romans 1:29-31 includes greed and envy and gossip and haughtiness and heartlessness and ruthlessness – all sins of which the Jews were clearly guilty as well! The point Paul will hammer home in these first three chapters is clear. There are no righteous people – period, Jew or

Gentile, pagan or pious! None are innocent no matter how righteous they may believe themselves to be.

3. The only difference in the parable and in the account here in Romans is the repentance of the tax collector. Paul is about to explain this in the context of an implied question that surely would have been asked by the Jews. The question would refer to the apparent kindness and patience of God toward the Jews. What about that? Does not His kindness toward them mean something?

III. ONE EXCEPTION/SOLUTION - REPENTANCE

A. Understanding the purpose of God's kindness, forbearance and patience

1. Kindness has to do with favor extended and here it is not just a little kindness but the "riches of His kindness." Forbearance and patience are similar concepts that remind us that God will punish sin, but He does not necessarily punish immediately. He may endure months, years, even decades of stubbornness and resistance toward His call for repentance. Surely kindness speaks of the benefits God bestows, and forbearance speaks of the judgment He withholds, and patience describes the duration of both. There is kindness and forbearance and patience, but why?
2. Why is God kind, even to sinners? Why does He delay His judgment to those who clearly deserve it? Why is He so patient toward sinners? I am reminded of what the Apostle Peter wrote in his second letter (**3:4-9**). God is waiting for our repentance. Though young, I heard the Gospel for months before I trusted the Savior. If God has chosen to return or if He took my life during those months that I was resisting the Gospel, I would have perished. But God, in His patience and forbearance, demonstrated His kindness toward me as He worked in my heart and regenerated my heart that I might trust the Lord Jesus Christ. His patience resulted in my repentance that brought to me His salvation.
3. The Jews thought the kindness of God was because they were so good. His kindness and forbearance and patience rather were because they were so bad. They thought His kindness was a reward for their goodness rather than a delay in their deserved judgment.
4. How often I have heard people say, "I am so blessed by God. I must be doing something right." That, my friends is bad theology. The blessing of God is based on the character of God not the conduct of a person. Often God's kindness and

patience and forbearance are directed toward us so that we will see His grace and mercy and repent, not so that we will pat ourselves on the back for a job well done! He extends His kindness not to swell our heads, but to break our hearts. That is the purpose for the kindness of God. So how are we to respond to such kindness?

B. Responding to the reason for God's kindness, forbearance and patience

1. There are only two responses possible. Either we will see our need for His mercy and repent of our sins, and receive that mercy, or we will harden our hearts toward His kindness and store up for ourselves His judgment. Commentator Matthew Henry wrote, "There is in every willful sin a contempt for the goodness of God."
2. When God leads us to repentance, we will have a profound change of heart and mind and that will be demonstrated in a new hatred of sin and a growing hatred for hypocrisy and a new love for Jesus, which responds to Him in humility and faith, saying as it were, "You are my only hope." If we fail to repent, our hearts will grow colder and more callous.
3. "Storing up wrath" is a frightening concept. Again, God does not settle all of His accounts immediately, but He does settle all of His accounts eventually. If I fail to repent, I merely accumulate the promise and severity of His wrath. We may assume we got away with something only to discover later – too late – that it was being held with interest to be poured out in unrestrained judgment.

Conclusion

1. We started with the parable of the sons. The first was a hut building hedonist who refused to repent, convincing himself that the only reason God wanted to enter the picture was to steal away what this foolish sinner had accumulated. That was the Gentile sinner in chapter 1.
2. Today we got our first introduction to the faultfinding judgmentalist. This sorry fellow spent his whole life justifying himself on the back of those he readily condemned, never realizing that the very things he condemned in others he practiced himself, thus pronouncing his own sentence! This is a picture of the self-righteous Jew. But it could also be the picture of some of us.
3. If either of these are a picture of you, there is only one thing to do – only one hope available. It is found in repentance, in throwing oneself on the mercy of God. Self-

justification leads to condemnation but repentance leads to forgiveness and forgiveness to life!