

THREE FINGERS

Scripture Reading: Read Romans chapter 2

Paul opens Romans chapter 2 with a stinging judgment: *“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.”*



His verdict reminds us of two familiar sayings, *“Takes one to know one”* and *“When you point one finger at someone else, there are three fingers pointing back to you.”*

Paul's indictment in this chapter is part of an ongoing discussion that begins in chapter 1 and concludes in chapter 3 and focuses on the need all human beings have for God's righteousness. In chapter 1, Paul stresses that all human beings have the truth about God but choose to suppress it (1:18-20) and reject it (1:21, 38). By so doing, folks develop futile thinking and darkened hearts that leads down the path of idolatry, sexual immorality and perversion, depravity and every kind of wickedness, evil and greed (1:22-32) as God gives sinners up to their sin (1:24, 26, 28). The state of sinful humanity that Paul describes in Romans 1 would have been quite obvious and in plain view in the streets of Rome. Even the Roman poet Juvenal referred to Rome as a “filthy sewer into which the dregs of the empire flood.” The ancient philosopher, Seneca, noted that Rome was “a cesspool of iniquity.” Paul was not painting an inaccurate picture.

The Jews of the 1st century would have heartily agreed with Paul's assessment of the sinfulness of the Gentile world. They would have applauded and pointed their finger of self-righteous judgment at the Gentiles. In so pointing, however, they set themselves up for judgment because they were guilty of not obeying God's laws either. Even though the Jewish people had received numerous benefits by virtue of their heritage and believed they were wise, a guide for the blind, superior, an instructor of the foolish and a teacher of infants (2:17-20), they had actually caused God's name to be blasphemed among the Gentiles because of their hypocrisy (2:23-24). They were prideful and self-righteous, trusting and depending on their heritage, their law and their circumcision to carry them but they had failed to keep God's law and had rejected Jesus the Messiah. They had three fingers of judgment pointing back at them, a point Paul makes crystal clear in this chapter.

So, how about us? How often do we find ourselves excusing our “stuff” while focusing on everyone else's around us? Paul's point here sounds awfully similar to Jesus' warning back in Matthew about having a plank in our eye while focusing on the speck in our brother's eye. It's easy to slip into a self-righteous and judgmental attitude. Paul reminds us, though, of the dangers of that approach in this chapter. It's wise to take heed.

Action Step & Prayer Focus: Is it possible that what bothers us in others is the “stuff” God is trying to point out in our own lives? In other words, does it take one to know one? Take some time today to reflect on the “stuff” you see in others and ask the Lord to show you how much of what you see is simply a reflection of what he wants to change in you.

Take-a-way: *Open hands in humility is better than finger pointing in judgment.*