

• Two types of sinner – the “degraded” and the “nice respectable”

• Still true today

1. The ‘respectable’ sinner still needs salvation

• Actually the moral person will be condemned by his own standards

2. God’s judgement is too searching for the moral person to survive it

• God looks at the heart

3. The nice sinner makes some bad mistakes

There are of course two types of ‘sinner’. Paul has been speaking to the disgusting, degraded pagan of ancient Rome. But there were much nicer people around. There were respectable pagans who tried to be superior to their contemporaries. And there were the Jews who had the law of God and thought that possessing the law of God made them very different from the typical pagan of the ancient world. It is still true today. There are plenty of very nice pagans around.

1. Now Paul goes on to insist that **the respectable sinner is not in a better position so far as salvation is concerned.**

¹Therefore you are without excuse, every one of you who passes judgement on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgement do the same things. The shocking sinner was ‘without excuse’^{□1}, and the respectable sinner is ‘without excuse’^{□2} also! Sin can be committed in a very quiet, respectable way. The moral, respectable, nice person says, ‘I am not like them. Look at what they do. Look at their drink, their drugs, their immorality, their corruption and dishonesty. I am not like them so I must be alright.’ But actually the moral person is characterized by a critical spirit, and eventually will be condemned by his own standards. He denounces outrageous sins. But he denounces himself at the same time without realizing it because he is guilty of similar sins in a subtle way. A man denounces a dishonest politician but he is dishonest himself. Or someone denounces some racist society but is full of prejudice himself. ‘With the judgement you pronounce . . . you will be judged’^{□3}.

2. **God’s judgement is too searching for the moral person to be able to survive it.** The differences between people cannot get rid of the fact that all have sinned. The respectable person has no excuse because, despite his judgemental attitude, he is guilty of the sins he condemns^{□1}. Paul develops the point: ²And we know that the judgement of God against those who do such things is based on truth. We judge both ourselves and other people poorly. We defend ourselves. We find it difficult to believe that God’s judgement will touch us. We think that somehow we shall escape. But God’s judgement is strictly according to truth. The secrets of the heart will be exposed to him. God looks at the heart as well as the external appearance.

3. **The nice sinner makes some bad mistakes.** ³And do you suppose that when you – a human being like anyone else – pass judgement upon those who practise such things and yet do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgement of God? Nice sinners take their acceptance with God for granted and do not really face the Word of God. They do not apply the things they know to themselves, and are very optimistic about getting somehow through judgement day. But Paul says all of this is the sin of presumption. ‘Do you suppose that... you will escape...?’

□1 1:20

□2 2:1

□3 Matthew 7:1-5

□1 2:1

• *The nice sinner needs a saviour just as much*

• *The nice sinner does not love God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength*

• *God's great forbearance – holding back judgement is to allow an opportunity for repentance*

• *God presents to us our need of a Saviour so that we might receive the Saviour*

Yes, he does! He feels that he is not like those terrible gentiles mentioned in Romans chapter 1! But the nice sinner needs a Saviour as much as the horribly wicked person. For God's judgement is based on reality. We are mistaken if we think our respectability means that we can escape, but the trouble is that nice sinners misunderstand God. Paul says: *⁴Or do you think lightly of the riches of his kindness and forbearance, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?* The answer is 'yes!' That is precisely what happens in the nice sinner. He or she does 'think lightly of the riches of his kindness and forbearance'. They are at bottom as much a sinner as everyone else. They certainly do not love the God of the Bible with all their heart and soul and mind and strength. They do not actually love their fellow human beings as they love themselves.

But all of this time God is showing great forbearance. He holds back his wrath, his judgement. He delays acting against us because he allows opportunity to repent. Don't you know, says Paul, that the kindness of God is leading you to repentance? Don't think lightly of God's goodness, he says. Use it while there is time. Repent! The word means 'change your mind'. It is admitting that you are wrong. It is the first breath of faith. If you do not repent you are actually storing up the experience of God's anger for a future day. *⁵But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgement of God...*

The human heart is 'impenitent'. It refuses to change its mind about God, refuses to let God speak, refuses to be corrected and taught by God. What, then, is the future of the moral man who will not come to salvation? At first, nothing happens to him. He gets on well in life. No calamity strikes him. However, what is happening is that he is storing up wrath for himself. God does nothing for the moment about the moral sinner. But judgement will still come. It is being stored up for the future. Why does God tell us all of this? Not to denounce us but to save us. He exposes our wound in order to heal. He mentions our wickedness in order to forgive us our wickedness. He presents to us our need of a Saviour so that we might receive the Saviour.



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