

## A Commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Romans [2]

### Chapter 2:1-16: 'There is no partiality with God'

**Verses 1-3: The Jewish Situation:** Paul develops his thesis that sin is a universal factor for both Jew and gentile. This section is addressed to fellow-Jews' self-righteous attitude toward gentiles. Paul uses 'you who judge' 8 times in chapter 2, that echoes Jesus' own instruction, 'judge not, that you be not judged' [Mathew 7:1] and 'he who without sin cast the first stone' [John 8:7]. Human judgment is partial, erroneous; one who sits in judgment too is a sinner; only a righteous God can shed light on human conduct or help judge oneself [not judging must be distinguished from critique; not judging would mean not condemning the other person and critique is examining and rejecting unjust/inhuman behavior both structural and personal; critique is with charity and its goal is conversion]. Jews think that they are superior to gentiles because of God's self-revelation to Israel and the covenant. Paul does not buy this argument and says, Jews 'practice the same thing' they accuse of the gentiles; vices listed in chapter 1 are committed by Jews too! God's justice is universal for Jew and gentile. Paul himself a Jew, was very aware of human situation when he said: 'I am the biggest sinner of all' [1Timothy 1:15].

**Verses 4-5: God's forbearance and Patience:** forbearance is 'delay of wrath' [we cannot attribute to God 'wrath' in the sense of human emotions of anger/revenge; it is justice of God]. God's mercy/patience is meant to lead humans to repentance. Many psalms are a celebration of God's mercy [Psalms 25; 69; 86; 100; 106; 109; 136; 145]. As covenant people Jews always appealed to God's mercy: 'you, our God is kind and true, patient and ruling all things in mercy. For even if we sin we are thine, knowing thy power; but we will not sin, because we know that we are accounted as yours' [Wisdom 15:1-2]. Paul speaks of hardened/impenitent hearts. God revealing himself to Israel in the Exodus-Event was manifestation of his compassion/mercy toward a suffering and oppressed people, a condemnation of structural sin of slavery. But whenever Israel sinned God's mercy called them to repentance [conversion]. God's universal standard of justice/mercy [not retribution] is granted to Gentiles who repent as well!

**Verses 6-11: Humans created for Eternal Life:** Paul considers Jewish rejection of the proclamation of the gospel as unfaithfulness to God's covenant with Israel. This entails 'storing up wrath'- deviation from path of life or God's 'indignation' at not accepting his mercy. Human rebellion, both Jew and Gentile, against Christ will be revealed on the day of judgment-day of judgment is already here in human life in the presence of Risen Christ and his gospel. Evil contains its own wrath and fury; distress and burdens of society are created by unjust/sinful structures. Paul says that those who do good will have a share in God's glory, honor and peace in eternal life. Paul here refers to Wisdom 2:23, 'for God created man for incorruption and made him in the image of his own eternity'. Paul does not explain whether affliction caused by evil is temporal or eternal but he is clear about what eternal life is! Every single person is called to eternal life and rejection of vices is a universal call. God shows no partiality; salvation is God's free gift to all in Christ-Paul explains this in detail in the following chapters!

**Verses 12-16: Judgment and Law of Moses:** Paul says that Jews who are given the Law of Moses will be judged by the Law and no excuse for disobeying it. He says fellow Jews sinned by not accepting Christ who is the fulfilment of Law. On the other hand Gentiles sinned without the Law, ignoring the law written in their hearts/conscience. Jews' claims [Law], title [covenant people] are no good before God. Life, behavior of fairness must flow from law of God ingrained in the hearts of all. Law of Moses was a positive affirmation of what was already given in creation [example: killing of Abel by Cain-primordial society knew what was right and wrong. Lord himself said to Cain, 'If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is couching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it'-Genesis 4:6-7]. Paul dismantles self-defense and justification by Jew/gentile for their unjust behavior. In these introductory chapters of Romans, Paul argues from the context of the law, how one is justified by God before the coming of Christ and setting the stage to explain what is human condition in Jesus Christ?

Father Jose