

Intro: Several months ago I heard a knock at the door of my study. A woman in her mid 30's stood there, and the lines on her face indicated she was obviously in great emotional pain. I listened as she recounted her story of hurt and confusion--a failed marriage, an abusive male friend, frustration in raising a wayward teenager, and a sense of overwhelming failure in her relationship with God. Everything this person said to me that day can be summed up in one simple phrase, "I need help."

Now I know that there are no pat answers to complex problems. Yet I also know that through Christ, there is hope no matter how great the problem. There truly is help available for the person who is willing to admit they need help.

But what about the person who won't admit they have a need? How do you help someone who is blind to their true condition? How do you help the person who can't see that they are in need of help? Frankly, in one sense, it's easy to help the person who has hit rock bottom because they are searching. They know they can't make it on their own. But with the self-sufficient person, it's a different story. What do you do to help him or her? What can you do?

This is not a hypothetical question. All of us have someone for whom we are concerned who falls into this category. They have a need, even a glaring need, but they can't see it. We can, but they are blind spiritually. They think they are Ok. How can we help them?

That's the very issue God's Word addresses for us in Romans 2. How do you help a moralist? How do you help a "good person" see his/her true condition before God? The apostle Paul gives us insight into the subject in Romans 2.

The premise of the book of Romans is revealed in Rom 1:16-17. All people need the gospel of Christ, for all people need the righteousness that is available only through the gospel. Paul devotes the first three chapters to the issue of "need." In chapter one, he shows the "immoralist" needs God's righteousness. The heathen, the pagan, the Gentiles have a need. Their need is fairly obvious.

Who is Paul talking to in Romans 2? A shift occurs. He moves from talking about "them" (in ch 1) to "you" (in ch 2). It's the moralist Paul addresses in chapter two.

Who is a "moralist"? Primarily, Paul's talking to a religious Jew. In vv 1-4, we learned how a moralist thinks. We saw three misconceptions the moralist adopts: "I'm Ok because I'm better than most." "I'm Ok because my good outweighs my bad." "I'm Ok because my God is too kind to judge me." He has a distorted view of other people, of himself, and of God.

How do you help a person who thinks that way? Here's the answer Paul gives us. He needs a reality check. A moralist needs to be shocked into reality.

***Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

The picture that comes to my mind is that of a doctor's office. A man in his mid 40's is sitting on the white paper of the examining table. The tests are over, and the results are in. The doctor leans forward in his swivel chair, and looks the fellow in the eye. "Mr. Jones, you are in serious trouble. If you don't change your lifestyle, you are going to die of a heart attack before you reach the age of 55. Your cholesterol count is too high. You don't exercise. You don't eat right. You may look Ok on the outside now, but I'm telling you, you are in great danger."

That's what Paul does with the moralist in Romans 2. He jolts him with three shocking truths. We can learn from his example.

Proposition: According to Romans 2:5-11, to help a moralist, we must enable the person to come to grips with three shocking truths.

- I. Your problem is severe (5-6).
 - A. A moralist has a problem with his heart.
 - B. A moralist has a problem with reality.
- II. Your future is bleak (7-10).
 - A. Option #1 is eternal life (7, 10).
 1. It belongs to those with the right ambition.
 2. It belongs to those with the right action.
 - B. Option #2 is eternal wrath (8, 9).
 1. It belongs to those with the wrong ambition.
 2. It belongs to those with the wrong action.
- III. Your God is impartial (11).

I. Your problem is severe (5-6).

How severe? V 5 "But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, Who will render to every man according to his deeds."

How is it that people can be ignorant about their condition before God? How can "intelligent," "good" people convince themselves that they are Ok before God, when in fact, they are not? In vv 5-6, God's Word reveals the fact that the moralist has a twofold problem.

A. A moralist has a problem with his heart.

Notice the condition of the moralist's heart. His heart is plagued by "hardness." The Greek word is "sklarotata" from which we get our English word "sclerosis." Sclerosis is a disease in which body tissue hardens. The liver is designed to protect the body by filtering the blood of impurities. But when sclerosis attacks, the liver hardens and doesn't fulfill its intended function.

So the moralist. His heart is afflicted by spiritual sclerosis. He is stubborn. Few problems are as tragic as a stubborn, hard-hearted person. He is closeminded to the truth. He is not open to dialogue. He's so convinced of his self-righteous condition, you can't reason with him. It's like talking to a wall to talk to him about his need. No doubt Paul thought of his Jewish brethren (see Rom 10:1-3).

Something else is wrong with the moralist's heart. It is "impenitent." What does that mean? The word Paul uses is actually the word "repentant" (see in v 4) with a negative prefix. The moralist's problem is that his heart is stubborn and unrepentant. He's not willing to change. He's not willing to admit, "I'm wrong. I have a need." He has a heart problem.

Related to his heart problem is a second malady.

B. A moralist has a problem with reality.

Notice what he does. In v 5 Paul says the moralist "treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath..." The verb "treasurest up" is a vivid term. Picture your bank account. You get out of it what you put into it. When you walk up to the teller, you make a deposit, from which one day you will make a withdrawal. One thing is for sure. If you deposit blocks of cement, you won't withdraw bars of gold.

But the moralist can't see that. He has a reality problem. He thinks he is treasuring up quite an inheritance for eternity. But he has a shock in store. What he is storing up is not treasure, but wrath.

In his reality check, Paul asks the moralist to look ahead to a future time. In v 5, he takes the humanist to the judgment of God. He shows him what he will receive from God in light of the deposit he has made. The news is sober. "You will receive God's wrath and God's judgment."

Why will the moralist receive wrath? Didn't he do a lot of good in this life? Wasn't he better than a lot of people? The reason is given in v 6. Notice what is true of God, "Who will render to every man according to his deeds." God doesn't grade on a curve. He doesn't compare people and reward the elite. No, His judgment is just and fair. He judges according to the individual's deeds. And the truth is this. All of us are sinners. All of us, even the moralist, deserve the wrath of God.

Didn't we learn in 1:18 that God is already revealing His wrath against this world? In one sense, yes. Yet in another, there is coming a day of wrath, a day of judgment. It's as if God's wrath against people's sin is being stored up like a huge reservoir. Until one day, when the reservoir is full, and God pours it forth.

Be careful to not read a judgment "timeline" into vv 5-6. Paul is not saying there will be only one judgment. Scripture teaches elsewhere that there will be several judgments. God will judge different groups at different times. There will be the judgment of Israel at Jesus' second coming (Ezek 20). There will be the judgment of the Gentiles (Mt 25). There will be the judgment of Christians at the Beama seat (II Cor 5). There will be the Great White Throne judgment (Rev 20). The focus of Romans 2:5 is not on the details of who will be judged when. The focus is on the fact that God will judge all people (see Bible Knowledge Com.). All people includes the moralist.

So how do you help someone who has a problem with his heart and reality? Here's how Paul tried to help. He told them this first shocking truth in terms they could not miss. "You have a severe problem!"

The moralist finds this statement to be shocking, even revolting. Why so? "Why do I have a server problem? My God is kind. A kind God won't judge me,

maybe a really bad person, but not me." What do you say to a person who thinks that way? Paul jolted the moralist with a second shocking truth.

II. Your future is bleak (7-10).

Why so? Because there are two, and only two, categories of people in this world. And God determines the criteria for the categories. In vv 7-10, Paul lays out the contrast. There are two groups of people and two consequences. There are two, and only two, options from which to choose.

A. Option #1 is eternal life (7, 10).

V 7 "To them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life." There's the first option. Some people will receive eternal life. Think of that, friend. Eternal life. Life without end. I Cor 2:9 "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him."

Who will enjoy eternal life? The person characterized by two marks...

1. It belongs to those with the right ambition.

The word "seek" (in v 7) is in the present tense, indicating a person who "keeps on seeking." Seeking has to do with ambition. And ambition has to do with values. Paul says the person who will enjoy eternal life is the person who lived this life with the right values. That is, he valued the things which matter for eternity.

What things matter for eternity? Look at the answer in v 7, "Glory, honor, and immortality." What does that mean? A person who will experience eternal life is the person who seeks glory--God's glory; honor--God's honor; and immortality--that which will not see corruption. Eternal life belongs to the person who lives this life with the right ambition. There's a second mark.

2. It belongs to those with the right action.

V 7 says eternal life belongs to those whose lives are characterized "by patience continuance in well-doing." What does that mean? The NASB translates the phrase, "perseverance in doing good." We don't talk about "perseverance" or "persistence" or "continuance" very much. Yet historically, one of the key terms used to summarize the biblical doctrine of salvation is the term "perseverance." The "perseverance of the saints" is a beautiful doctrine. God perseveres in behalf of His children. His children persevere in obedience to God. "My sheep hear my voice and they follow Me," Jesus said (Jn 10:27). Genuine Christians persevere after Christ. E. F. Harrison put it this way, "Profession does not take the place of production (29)."

How do we persevere? Paul says, "By patient continuance in well-doing." True salvation lasts for a lifetime. If it doesn't last, it reveals it's not true. Paul repeats the truth in v 10, "But glory, honor, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."

You say, "Wait a minute. Worketh good? What's Paul talking about? Is he saying a person goes to heaven based on their works, their merit?" No, for two reasons. One, we must interpret this statement in light of other relevant Scriptures. In

fact, Paul will have much to say about the subject of "works" later in Romans is his discussion of justification. We are justified by faith, not by works. Two, remember who he's talking to--the moralist, the person who is convinced in his mind that he's going to heaven because he's good enough. Paul's point is this. You are not good enough. Eternal life belongs to those who have the right ambition and action, namely, those who have put Christ first in their lives.

B. Option #2 is eternal wrath (8, 9).

Who will experience eternal wrath? The person characterized by two marks...

1. It belongs to those with the wrong ambition.

V 8 "But unto them that are contentious." The word "contentious" means "rivalry." It has to do with ambition. The NASB translates, "But to those who are selfishly ambitious." The person who lives life for self lives with the wrong ambition. We were created to live for God, and others.

2. It belongs to those with the wrong action.

V 8 They "do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness." V 9 "Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil." Eternal wrath belongs to the person who "disobeys" (lit. "keeps on disobeying") and "does evil" (lit. "keeps on producing evil").

What a person does reveals what a person is. My conduct, whether good or evil, reveals the condition of my heart. If a person continually does evil, he is showing that his heart is unregenerate. And an unregenerate person is doomed to eternal wrath.

Those are the two options. The person who seeks glory, honor, and immortality does so by placing faith in the finished work of Christ, and the result is eternal life. The person who refuses Christ, and chooses unrighteousness instead, will experience eternal wrath. Now do you see why Paul says to the moralist, "Your future is bleak"?

But the moralist has a another problem. He tries to introduce a third option. Stuart Briscoe makes this observation (61), "It is crucially important that we notice that Paul presents only two alternatives. There is a universal human tendency to introduce at least a third alternative into matters of this nature. This third alternative is usually the place reserved for the person establishing it. It is a place of quiet immunity--a tranquil area in which what happens to the rest of the world can't happen to me! But Paul denies everyone the privilege of such a position. We all come under one or the other position; we all adopt one or the other lifestyle; we will all reap one or the other harvest. No excuses, no exceptions, no exemptions."

It's not popular to talk about this. When you talk about there being only two options, you ruffle feathers. The moralist would rather not think about the issue of eternity.

Gary Storm shared with me the amazing story of what happened to his brother two weeks ago. He was flying with his family in his small aircraft, when he ran into severe weather. A wind gust caused his plane to crash on an island in Wisconsin. The plane eventually erupted into flames, but not before all those on board were miraculously able to get away to safety. It's nothing short of God's intervention that

spared their lives. While in the hospital recovering, Gary's brother was interviewed by TV reporters. After recounting the amazing story, he was asked, "Weren't you afraid you were going to die?" He replied, "No. As one who believes in Jesus Christ, death means that I am going to a better place. For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." When the interview was shown on TV, do you know what the reporters did? They edited out the comments about Jesus Christ, and eternal life.

How do you help a moralist? You must help him to see his true condition. Romans 2 reveals to the moralist, "Your problem is severe. Your future is bleak."

But suppose he says to you, "Well, I'll take my chances with God. I don't buy all this stuff about eternal wrath. I'm Ok."

Him him to consider a third shocking truth.

III. Your God is impartial (11).

V 11 "For there is no respect of persons with God." There is no partiality with God (NASB). God does not show favoritism (NIV). The TEV puts it this way, "God judges everyone by the same standard."

That's sobering news for a person who tries to rationalize his way out of everything. Mark Twain once said, "It's not what I don't understand about the Bible that bothers me; it's what I do understand!" (in K. Hughes, Liberating Ministry, 40).

Favoritism is a big problem in life now. It won't be then. Now, if your rich enough, and powerful enough, you can pull strings, and can't what you want. You can even twist justice. Might makes right.

But be assured of this. There is no respect of persons with God. When we stand before God, there will be no manipulating, no maneuvering. Whether Jew or Greek, it matters not. God sees the real you. And He is impartial.

Conclusion:

How do you help a moralist? Paul says to us, "Lay out these three shocking truths. Your problem is severe. Your future is bleak. Your God is impartial."

How does Paul know the moralist so well? Why is Paul so pointed with the moralist? The answer is simple. He used to be one himself. He used to be blinded by his own self-righteousness. But Christ set him free.

There was a time in his life when Paul thought he was Ok with God because he had the right ethnic background, the right religious heritage, the right education, the right resume of good deeds. He was a religious zealot, exceeded by none.

Then one day, he found out the shocking news that God is no respecter of persons. God plays no favorites. God has no pets. God held him accountable. He was a sinner in desperate need.

Oh beloved, all people are alike before God. Church membership doesn't give us favor with God. A good family doesn't give us favor with God. The right creed doesn't give us favor with God. There is no respect of persons with God. The question above all questions is this. Do you have a Savior, or don't you? Is Christ in your life, or isn't he?