

Intro: I had a conversation Tuesday with a person who was in New York City a couple of weeks ago. He happened to have been there while the "Gay Games" were taking place. Thousands of people turned out to promote with pride their homosexual lifestyle. On Sunday, June 26, a massive Gay March was organized through the streets of our country's largest city. During the march, something amazing happened. Six or seven jets flew overhead in formation. All eyes turned to see that their jet-stream had marked the sky with this sober message, "God hates your sin. Repent or perish."

A lot of good people are upset about the rampant spread of immoral behavior in our country. They are fed up with the militant promotion of "alternate" lifestyles. They are willing to pay thousands of dollars to put jet stream messages in the sky to let the world know they disapprove. They write letters to newspaper editors. They speak out on radio talk-shows.

Good people are alarmed, even angry. Perhaps you were as we studied Romans 1 during the month of June. We learned that God hates sin. We learned that God is revealing His wrath against ungodliness (18). We learned that when people give up on God, God gives them up (24, 26, 28)--He lets them experience the tragic consequences of their foolish choices. We learned that turning from God results in depraved thinking (28), deviant behavior (29-31), and distorted values (32). We learned that people who turn from God place themselves under the judgement of God (32).

The latter half of Romans 1 is a dismal account to ponder. The apostle Paul's point is clear. Our world needs the righteousness of God. Our sick society needs the deliverance that is available only through the gospel of Christ.

After studying Romans 1, some of us are thinking, "Yea, I agree, our society needs help! Homosexuals needs help. Immoral people need help. Murderers need help. God-haters need help. They are under God's wrath." If that's what you are thinking, hold on to your seat. Romans 2 is going to jolt you.

Guess what Paul tells us in Romans 2? "Good" people need help too! Do you know why? Because "good" people tend to be self-righteous. And in God's sight, self-righteousness is no better than unrighteousness. "Moral" sinners are no better than "immoral" sinners. In Romans 2, Paul points the arrow at the self-righteous person, the moralist, and says, "Don't be too quick to point your accusing finger at the other guy. You are in danger, too, just like the pagan."

I have entitled this message, "The Danger of Being a Good Person." Did you realize "good" people are in danger? Many are, and they don't even realize it. What kind of danger? What's their problem? Let's read Romans 2:1-4, and find out.

Proposition: According to Paul's warning in Romans 2:1-4, a "good" person (a moralist) is prone to have three distorted views.

***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.

- I. A moralist has a distorted view of others (1).
- II. A moralist has a distorted view of himself (1).
 - Three common misconceptions:
 - A. "I'm Ok because I'm better than most."
 - B. "I'm Ok because my good outweighs my bad."
 - C. "I'm Ok because my God is too kind to judge me."
- III. A moralist has a distorted view of God (2-4).
 - A. He misunderstands the Judgment of God (2-3).
 - 1. God's judgment is objective.
 - 2. God's judgment is certain.
 - 3. God's judgment is impartial.
 - B. He misunderstands the Kindness of God (4).

Who is Paul talking to in Romans 2? Notice a shift. He moves from talking about "them" (in ch 1) to "you" (in ch 2). Paul has two categories of people in mind: the heathen and the humanist, the "immoralist" and the moralist. Both are under the wrath of God. It's the moralist Paul addresses in chapter two.

I. A moralist has a distorted view of others (1).

In v 1, Paul uses a common literary device from his day. He dialogues with an imaginary person, a moralist. It's as if he can read the fellow's mind. The moralist followed Paul's reasoning in 1:18-32, and thought to himself, "I never killed anyone. I don't cheat on the job. I love my wife and my kids. I have high ethical standards. Therefore, God's judgment doesn't apply to me." To that critic, Paul now speaks--to the "good" person, to the humanist, to the moralist.

Not everybody in the world commits the "big sins." Some people do a lot of good, humanitarian things. What about their condition?

Notice Paul's pointed indictment in v 1, "Therefore (in light of the teaching of ch 1), thou (2nd person, singular) art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest."

Here's the first area. A moralist tends to have a distorted view of others. He judges others. He puts himself behind the judge's bench, and makes decisions about others he considers to be guilty. A moralist condemns others.

You say, "There are times when we must judge, aren't there?" Yes, we must be fruit inspectors. I Thes 5:21-22 tells us, "Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil." But when is judging others wrong? V 1 "For wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things." The NIV reads, "because you who pass judgment do the same things."

Paul states two reasons why the moralist (the humanist) is wrong for judging the heathen (notice the repeated use of the indicator "for"). The first reason is that when you condemn another person of sin, you are condemning yourself by the same standard. The second is that the moralist is actually guilty of the same problem he is condemning! Though his sins are different, and may be less frequent, he is a sinner nonetheless.

I would suggest the moralist is alive and well in America today. And the danger of the moralist is much more subtle than the overt threat of the immoralist. There's a

great movement in our country of people who proudly say, "I'm pro-family. I'm anti-abortion. I'm anti-gay. I'm for welfare reform. I'm for sending relief to Rwanda. Therefore, I am Ok. I am not like the immoralists."

I want to pose some questions. Can a person be pro-family, and lost? Can a person be anti-abortion, and yet under the wrath of God? Can a person give thousands of dollars a year to charity, and yet be spiritually bankrupt before God?

Herein lies the problem of the moralist. He has a distorted view of others. He's violated Jesus command in Mt 7:1-3, "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged...And why do you behold the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but consider not the beam that is in your own eye?"

A moralist has a distorted view of others. This is related to a second area of distortion.

II. A moralist has a distorted view of himself (1).

Listen to v 1 again, this time from the paraphrase of the Living Bible, "'Well,' you may be saying, 'what terrible people you have been talking about!' But wait a minute! You are just as bad. When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are talking about yourselves, for you do these very same things."

A moralist has a distorted view of others because he has a distorted view of himself. When he reads his newspaper, and scans the articles about the gay activists and gang leaders and crack-sellers, he thinks to himself, "Those are bad dudes! They are a menace to society. They deserve the judgment of God. What the world needs are more people like me." The moralist has a distorted view of himself.

While on vacation last week, we stopped at a roadside rest. I noticed a large tree was crooked, and pointed in a slanted angle into the sky. I said to one of our children, "Look at that crooked tree. What do you think happened to it?" She replied in all sincerity, "Maybe the seed was planted crooked."

Sometimes we make good observations, but draw poor conclusions. The moralist is a case in point. He looks at the problems of society, and ends up with a distorted view of himself. In fact, a moralist is guilty of three common misconceptions:

A. "I'm Ok because I'm better than most."

You see this mentality in Paul's rebuke in v 1, "thou judgest another." The moralist is a person who compares himself/herself with another person, and comes away feeling pretty pious. Most of us are pretty good at this. We find someone who has "bigger" sins in their lives than we do (at least in our eyes), and we think God must be pleased with us. It's the mentality, "I may not be perfect, but I'm Ok because I'm better than most."

What's wrong with this type of thinking? This. It's based on a wrong view of sin. What makes sin so bad is not the greatness of the offense, but the greatness of the One against whom the offense is committed. Stuart Briscoe offers this explanation (56), It is "faulty logic that says because I don't do what he does I'm better than he and because I'm better than he I'm all right. This is self-righteousness of the worst kind. It is as ludicrous in its assumptions and conclusions as thinking that says that because you

owe a million dollars and I only owe half a million dollars, I don't owe as much as you, so therefore I'm free from debt!"

Romans 3 reminds us that all have fallen short of God's standard (23). None are righteous (10).

B. "I'm Ok because my good outweighs my bad."

See this mentality in v 3, "And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them who do such things, and do the same." A moralist doesn't claim to be perfect. In fact, he'll freely admit, "Sure I've got problems in my life. We all do. But I'm doing my best to make this a better world in which to live. What more can you expect?"

That's the moralist's second misconception. For the moralist, the bottom line is this, "I'm Ok because my good outweighs my bad."

C. "I'm Ok because my God is too kind to judge me."

V 4 "Or despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering?" God is good. God is patient. The word "goodness" is translated in the NASB as "kindness." God is kind. Aren't you glad He is?

But wait. Some people abuse the kindness of God. The moralist Paul has in mind does. He reasons, "Since God is kind, I'm Ok. He won't judge me. How could a kind God judge anybody (expect really bad people like Hitler or Stalin). I don't believe in the kind of God that sends people to hell. I believe in a God who is loving enough to accept me the way I am."

Sounds familiar, doesn't it? There are plenty of people sitting in churches who believe this. Are they right? Is God loving and kind? Yes, but He is also holy and just. And He takes sin seriously. How do I know that? He allowed His own Son to bear the curse of the cross.

So here are 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."

How do you respond to someone who thinks that way about himself? It's not easy. That's why it's much easier to evangelize someone who is immoral than it is a moralist. The immoralist knows he has a need, that's why he's filling his life with deviant behavior. The moralist doesn't see his need. He thinks he's Ok. He's irritated by the insinuation that he needs a Savior.

You may be wondering, "How then do you help a moralist?" Help the person take a reality check. How? By investigating the Scriptures. Do you know what the Scriptures will tell the moralist? This--If I think that God is impressed with me because I believe the good in my life outweighs the bad, I am in serious trouble. If I am depending on the lack of "big sins" in my life, or on my benevolence to impress God, I'm blinded by a delusion from the pit itself. The only thing I can point to in order to find acceptance before God is the Cross of Jesus Christ. I must never forget that.

The moralist has a deficient view of others, and of himself. But his biggest problem is a third, even more basic distortion.

III. A moralist has a distorted view of God (2-4).

The moralist Paul has in mind is probably a religious Jew. A good Jew in Paul's day prided himself in having a corner on the market when it came to God. No doubt, Paul's Jewish readers would have applauded what Paul had to say in Rom 1:18-32, when he told how God had condemned Gentiles for their immorality. The Jews called the Gentiles "dogs." A moralist Jew would say, "That's right. Those pagan Gentiles deserve to be judged."

Herein lies the moralist's biggest problem. He has a distorted view of God. He misunderstands two things about God.

A. He misunderstands the Judgment of God (2-3).

Notice the repetition of the phrase "judgment of God" in this section (1:32; 2:2, 3, 5). Paul knew his Jewish critic had a severe misunderstanding when it came to this topic. The Jews knew they were the chosen people of God. But eventually many came to this conclusion. God would judge everyone except the Jew.

One of the church fathers named Justin Martyr argued once with a Jew named Trypho about the position of the Jews. The Jew said (Barclay, 41), "They who are 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."

To clear up this confusion, Paul laid out three truths about God's judgment.

1. God's judgment is objective.

V 2 "But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth." God's judgment is based on an objective standard, not on a whim or fancy. It's based on truth. We can be sure of this. When we stand before the Judge one day, we will receive a fair trial!

Several months back I was called to be a prospective juror. The judge told us that in the trial they would seek to establish a verdict "beyond reasonable doubt." That's the best a human legal system can do. Witnesses are prone to error, and can even lie. The jury can be misled. The judge can make a mistake.

But know this. God is true. His judgment is based on truth. That means at the judgment of God, there will be no mistrial, no misunderstanding, no twisting of justice, no mistakes (Briscoe, 58).

2. God's judgment is certain.

V 2 "The judgment of God is...against them who commit such things." What things? The 23 vices listed in Rom 1:29-31. God judges sin. Sin deserves judgment. Sin brings judgment, all of it. God's judgment is certain.

Now, a moralist prides himself in being morally superior. So Paul points out a third truth.

3. God's judgment is impartial.

V 3 "And thinkest thou this...that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?" Here's what God says to the moralist in v 3, "You judge, but you do the SAME things! You may never kill a person, but you murder your boss with your words. You may never go to bed with your neighbor's wife, but you desire her in your heart. Do you

really think that God is going to give you a waiver, an excuse form? Do you think you will be exempt from His judgment?" No. God's judgment is impartial. He doesn't "let off" the person who finds a clever lawyer who can come up with a legal loophole. God is just. There is no loophole for a sinner, even a "good" sinner.

The moralist's misunderstanding of the Judgment of God is related to this.

B. He misunderstands the Kindness of God (4).

V 4 "Or despisest thou the riches of His goodness..." The word "despise" means "to think little of," or "to think lightly of." The literal word order of v 4 is actually reversed, and reads, "The riches of His goodness you think lightly of." We would be without hope were it not for God's goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering. But some people try to take advantage of God. They misrepresent His Goodness.

What is the goal of His goodness? V 4 "The goodness of God leads thee to repentance. When I repent, I admit I'm not the "good" person I thought I was. Rather, I'm a needy person.

Conclusion:

This morning we have explored the danger of being a good person. Obviously, there is nothing wrong with being good. But there's everything wrong with trusting in your own goodness to merit God's favor.

Friends, "nice" people don't go to heaven. Nor do "good" people. A prerequisite to going to heaven is admitting that you don't deserve to be there. That you are just as undeserving Judas himself. That Christ alone can make you deserving and righteous.

The problem is this. It's hard for a "good" people to admit they have a need. They don't see why they need a Savior. Am I speaking to you? Oh, you believe in Jesus, because that's what "good" people do. But you have never admitted your spiritual bankruptcy before God. You have never realized that all your righteous deeds are as filthy rags before God (Isa 64:6). You have never grasped that it was for YOUR sins that Jesus went to the cross. You have never called out to God, and asked Him to save YOU. I invite you to do so even now.

What if I am already a Christian? We need to take inventory, too. We as well are plagued by the danger of being a "good" person. Oh, we know our goodness didn't save us, that Christ alone saved us. Yet if we are honest, we tend to think that our goodness somehow merits God's favor. That God is impressed with us because we are better than others, because we stay away from "big sins." We, too, need to look to Christ today. We need to affirm that Christ alone makes us righteous.

Charles Elliott summed up this truth with the words of this familiar hymn, "Just as I am, without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me; And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee, O Lamb of God, I Come! Just as I am, and waiting not to rid my soul of one dark blot, to Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot, O Lamb of God, I come! Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind--Sight, riches healing of the mind, yea, all I need in Thee to find--O Lamb of God, I come!"