

Romans
Message 24
The Morality Cults 01
Rom 1:28-2:3

- 28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;
- 29 Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers,
- 30 Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents,
- 31 Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful:
- 32 Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

Romans 2

- 1 Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things.
- 2 But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things.
- 3 And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? KJV

Introduction:

There are some universal rules about reading, especially about reading serious and instructive material, information that is important to our welfare whether physical or spiritual. I think we can all agree that the information here is important to us spiritually.

The rules go like this.

Who is speaking? - Paul

To whom is he speaking? - the church at Rome and certain ones associated with it.

When is he speaking? - circa 62 A.D.

About what is he speaking? - The context.

Some of this is obvious but one item has not been clear and that is the identity of the 'O man' to whom he begins to speak in 2:1.

The general audience has remained the same - the Roman church - but Paul has begun to address a specific subset within his presumed audience.

Notice that the overall discussion has not changed - we are still talking about sin, sinners and judgment. But Paul believed that there were those within his audience who may have had a

wrong perspective or wrong set of conclusions concerning the matter at hand.

The chapter break emphasizes this change of voice but it has led many, I think, to read a larger division between 1:32 and 2:1 than actually exists. We have often mentioned that the chapter and verse divisions of our Bibles are additions to the text. They are helpful in that they help us locate things that are said, find them quickly and reference them to others. But they were not part of the original text and often they do not serve us well in understanding the argument, or 'case,' that a writer is making.

If you have the larger view of what Paul is talking about, you recognize that he is making a case that all of mankind is under the judgment of God for sin, and that rightly so. This that we are looking at today is a part of that case that Paul was making to the Romans.

The word 'therefore' connects what is said in chapter 2 with that which has been said in chapter 1 but it is very clear that he has begun to speak directly to some person or some group of persons, addressing them as if they were a single individual.

Let us quickly review. God has revealed Himself from Heaven but man has not 'liked' to retain that knowledge in his mind. He has invented to himself other gods and even worshiped the lowest parts of the Creation. Therefore, God has given man up to all kinds of wickedness but in spite of the fact that men know that God condemns such they not only practice these things but approve of others who practice them.

But then Paul's mind went to a possible class of hearer or reader, a person who agreed with him that these people practicing wickedness should be condemned and possibly agreed openly and vehemently in the condemnation of them.... but on some level.... this person practices these or similar things.... or things which may have the same moral condemnation before God.

And, at least part of his identification of them is understandable, they are people who agree with him concerning the wickedness of the wicked and the appropriateness of God's judgment upon them. But, they differ from him in that they are chargeable themselves on the same matters as those they criticize and 'judge.'

Now, before we go further, let us discuss for a minute the judging that Paul was referencing here. I have heard this verse perverted to say something like this, "if you judge someone for wickedness that means that you are doing the thing yourself." Now, that is crazy but some people have such a distorted view of things that this is the conclusion they draw.

Paul is not speaking against judging for he has just been doing it, criticizing wickedness and declaring that those who do such things are under the condemnation of God.

In fact, he is now moving on to 'judge' a similar but somewhat different category of human, those who openly judge wickedness while secretly practicing it.

So, do not be deceived by the 'judge not' crowd about this text. Paul is judging wicked people of several different flavors.

Our question, then, and the one we must solve is “who is this ‘man’ that condemns others and yet is guilty of the same things?”

There are things which should be obvious here.

Such a person would not be an overt and publicly practitioner of these wicked things. Such behavior would be so disconnected from reality that no one would think him sane.

Therefore, the similar sins he practices would be things either cleverly hidden from others, or things which are not *clearly* in the same categories, issues excused by rational explanations or simply generally accepted as NOT profoundly wicked.

There are things which Jesus taught as being wicked on a profound level that are often not obviously so to men.

Matt 5:21-22

21 Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment:

22 But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. KJV

I am sure that the connection of anger with a brother and murder was shocking to these people. They did not readily make the connection. Neither did they associate the common insults that people threw at each other with profound wickedness such that any person who practiced them was in danger of Hell itself.

These are the kinds of things, no doubt, that Paul had in mind as he wrote down these words, profound wickedness which did not seem as such to many.

This opens a whole new world of possibilities in this idea of rebellion and sin against God - The Fraudulent Moralist. And, we know of at least one specific group at Rome (as well as in the rest of the world) that had already been exposed as such - the Jews. Jesus had rigorously called them out over their moralistic hypocrisy.

Matt 23:13-31

13 But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.

They purported and represented themselves to be those who escorted people into the Kingdom of God. They supposedly knew how one might be right with God and also supposedly taught others how to be as well.

But in reality they were no part of God's Kingdom and their behavior hindered those who were desiring to enter it.

Instead of teaching righteousness they taught unrighteousness (1:29) and instead of Loving God they hated Him (1:30).

They hated and judged, criticized and maligned, those who taught false religion but they taught one which was just as false and just as fruitless as that of the pagans.

Do you see how this worked? They did not recognize their sins for what they were even though they were the same sins they 'judged.'

- 14 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.

Here is one which we almost cannot comprehend. They pretended an extreme devotion to God, making long public prayers to enhance their image as godly people. But they did not hesitate at all to take away from a widow her only home if she could not pay a debt. There was no mercy in their souls even though they pretended to be recipients of great mercy from God.

Such a thing should be self-evident in a man's soul, especially a man who regularly went to the Synagogue to hear the prophets read, for they spoke clearly on the matter.

Isa 1:17

- 17 Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. KJV

Isa 10:1-2

- 1 Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness which they have prescribed;
2 To turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of my people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless! KJV

These would criticize and condemn the man who stole from them but then steal the only income a desperate person might have.

- 15 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.

They took pride in themselves for making a convert and then did not seem to care that their convert was not a good person. In fact, he was worse than themselves.

Then, Jesus turned to another issue of this particular morality cult and we see it repeating itself

over and over again in others. They made up rules about right and wrong, all the while ignoring the Law of God.

- 16 Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!
- 17 Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?
- 18 And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty.
- 19 Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?
- 20 Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon.
- 21 And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein.
- 22 And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.

Notice that Jesus is also pointing out that their rules are not even logical. But even though these moralists were extremely smart, even brilliant, men their logic was defective on matters of right and wrong.

He did the same thing with some who identified themselves as His disciples.

John 6:24-29

- 24 When the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, neither his disciples, they also took shipping, and came to Capernaum, seeking for Jesus.
- 25 And when they had found him on the other side of the sea, they said unto him, Rabbi, when camest thou hither?
- 26 Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.
- 27 Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.
- 28 Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?
- 29 Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent. KJV

These were people who sought after Jesus, asked how they might do the works of God, condemned wickedness and those who reject God but ultimately they turned their backs and walked away from Jesus, a greater sin than all of the others combined.

They were Convinced Moralists but yet they were wicked.

The question arises as to whether there were any such among the Gentiles, Moralists with secret lives of wickedness or with accepted behavior that is considered wicked by God.

We certainly see this system at play among the Muslims. If you have paid attention at all, they are a moralistic society with strict rules concerning many things and a condemnation of things that we agree are immoral.

But the same society that places strong condemnation on immorality and homosexuality allows and approves of the beating of women, the rape of children and the murder of those who hold to other systems of belief.

They would agree with Paul concerning many things that he listed as wicked.

- 29 Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers,
- 30 Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents,
- 31 Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful:

But, their strict moral code covers an underbelly of wickedness and perversion, they practice some of those very things and excuse them, which places them as well as the Jews squarely in the sight of Paul's question, "And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?"

Their answer would be, like the Jew, "Yes, I think I will escape the judgment of God." But Paul affirms that they are profoundly wrong.

These two groups are merely open and obvious examples of the kind of thought processes Paul was condemning. There are literally thousands, maybe tens of thousands, of similar schemes around the world.

Some of these people end up being attracted, like some of the Jews and pagans of the First Century, to the morality of Christianity but they do not figure out that they cannot become true Christians until that hidden life is confronted and the repentance becomes real.

This is one of the dangers of Christianity, and possibly one of the reasons we have this text, that it will descend, unless regularly visited by the Holy Spirit of God, into a moralism covering a wicked secret life.

In fact, this is the Great Danger of all Religion, period.

We constantly hear stories of people fiercely devoted to their religion and its teachings committing atrocities against others. Recently in India and in Africa as well as China there have been mass murders and imprisonments of Christians by people devoted to a set of "Moral Principles" who are practicing the very things they condemn in others.

We are seeing a live play being lived out before us in our political system every day. People throwing back and forth the charge of violating moral codes, doing things that are 'wrong' and

punishing one another concerning those issues.

Socialism is being promoted under the claim that it is moral and does right by people whereas Capitalism does them wrong. But Socialism, everywhere it has been tried, has produced some of the most grotesque violations of morality imaginable.

People are wanting to redistribute the money in our culture because once upon a time some of our ancestors did wrong to the ancestors of others and they claims it is *morally right* to take wealth from some and give it to others. But it is *NOT* morally right to take one's property without his agreement.

Even homosexuality is being promoted under the claim that it is *morally wrong* to discriminate against them and refuse to cooperate with their lifestyle, even though their behavior is clearly condemned by the Word of God.

All of these are Morality Cults of one persuasion or another certain that God is going to forgive them and persecute those who disagree with them.

But neither is this the full list. We live in a country with literally thousands of different brands of 'Christianity' each with its own set of moral codes and each condemning those who live by a different code. Each group is profoundly convinced that God is going to judge everyone but themselves and yet almost every group allows things that are condemned by God as immoral.

In fact, every group that has misunderstood, misapplied and misused the scriptures is a Morality Cult rather than a Christian faith.

Every Christian must make sure that he is not attached to a Morality Cult rather than a True Church of Jesus Christ.

There is a deep and profound perverseness in the human psyche which allows this kind of hypocrisy practiced by Morality Cults and deems it acceptable, even gather others to it.

It, too, is an evidence of a corrupt mind, so Paul addressed it here.

We would be mistaken to think he only meant the Jews, even though they would certainly be one of the groups in his mind.

In verses 1 & 2 of Romans chapter 2 he attacked the concept that moralism and the belittle of sinners while excusing similar wickedness in one's self or in his peer group (whether religious, social or political) is an escape from the Judgment of God Against All Wickedness and Unrighteousness.

God condemns ALL WICKEDNESS, ALL SIN, ALL VIOLATIONS OF HIS HOLY LAW.

Repentance means TURNING FROM ALL SIN.

Because you are more moral in your own eyes that others does not mean that your sins escape the notice of God or that your moralism rescues you from His Judgment.

Let's talk for a little bit about the kinds of moralism that we encounter directly every day.

First of all you must know and we all must recognize that the kind of moralism we are discussing is birthed either in an unregenerate heart or one that has seriously lost sight of its own wickedness.

Actual believers can fall into this trap and get their lives into an awful mess.

2 Peter 1:9

9 But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. KJV

Rev 3:18

18 I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. KJV

We can get to the place where we have lost sight of the precious realities by which we have been saved.

Repentance, the real thing, *always* looks at one's own sins first and considers them the worst. This is one of the reasons it is difficult to bring the human mind to repentance... others are "far worse" than him/her and, so, he/she is better than others (most others if the truth were told).

"I go to church, they don't" We have heard them say and yet every one who says that shows no real interest in following Christ seriously. They have not taken up the cross to follow Him.

"I believe in Jesus but I don't go to church because there are hypocrites there"

In other words, "I am better than the church goes"

But, again, this is not a person who has fully committed his/her life to God.

So, how does one distinguish between Moralistic Religion and True Religion?

Reminder: there are literally thousands of ways to get to a counterfeit conversion but only one way to true conversion.

There are many morality cults which masquerade as Christianity and Christian churches.

It was so with the Jew: Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots, Herodians etc.

Each one believes that all should convert to their cult.

But almost none of them have any real love for Christ or for Genuine Christianity.

The Real Thing has a morality, for sure, that far exceeds that of any of the cults.

But ‘morality’ per se’ is not the *primary interest* of the True Child of God... it is *absolute obedience to God* which includes godly morality (we are not arguing against that) but the real goal is an absolute giving of the self to God.

Without exception, though, the morality cults all pretend to be what they are not. They may tithe, like the Pharisees, even from the spices in their cabinets and then omit - or refuse to be faithful to - the weightier matters.

For the most part they choose the parts of God’s Law (or ‘morality’ in general) that are easiest on themselves and ignore or even actively violate the more difficult parts.

In fact, most of them actually violate the Law of God on some matters while adamantly criticizing violators of *their* “moral code.” The issues we looked at in Matt 23 illustrate how a morality cult operates.

So how do we distinguish a member of a morality cult who professes to be a Christian from a True Christian? (First, one must know what a True Christian is.)

The Morality Cult Member openly opposes *some* sin while hiding and excusing his own, just like the Pharisees did. His ‘repentance’ is dramatized but ultimately is all external.

He may be an avid promoter of religion but, then again, it is all in the externals.

What prayer did you pray?

How were you baptized?

How did you feel?

What formula was followed?

Etc. etc. etc.

He may be himself flagrantly religious and of a good disposition toward those in his own cult but bitter and hateful to those outside his group.

For the True Believer the religion is always first in the heart and then in the actions.

He understands himself to be a vile sinner apart from Christ, hopeless and helpless.

His whole hope of life is in the Great Work of Jesus Christ.

He does not trust himself nor any of his religion deeds for his salvation in any way.

He has repented of all of his sins and walks in daily repentance from them.

As we have already said, he is always concerned about his own sins first, before his concern for the sins of others.

And... he has an ongoing argument with Paul as to who is the chief of sinners.

He has an open faith and practice of Religion for sure but it is rooted in the heart, not worn as a cloak or a disguise.

He hates sin - his own the most - in all of its forms. He makes no excuses nor allowances for it. But at the same time he is able to experience real pity for sinners and love them without loving their sins.

In all reality he may not seem as religious to many as the Morality Cult Member because he, the true saint, disdains empty forms and rituals. Everything for him must be real, Biblical and God-honoring.

He is far more openly honest about the existence of weaknesses and failures in his life.

Finally, he openly despises and abominates all pretense in the name of Worship toward God.

Cult members, on the other hand, are best known for their arrogance and hypocrisy.

Paul's message? The way to heaven is not the criticism of others but the self-criticism of your own sins bringing you to Repentance.