

Being Self Righteous February 6, 2012

Last week we talked about the appalling conditions that occur when men and women decide the knowledge of God is not relevant for their lives; God said they become fools, their thinking is futile, they live lives that are in a continuous downward spiral of sin and they compound their foolishness by suppressing truth and encouraging others to sin along with them. So this is the first kind of person Paul is going to cite as an example of sinful man; this is the obviously wicked person who defies God.

Romans reminds me of a legal brief, that is Paul is making a case for mankind to be condemned by the Judge of all the earth. In a legal brief the prosecutor states his case against the defendant, mankind without God. It may seem a bit confusing but as Paul proposes the questions, he then supposes the answers people might give, and then he answers those people. In Romans 2 the first group to be considered is the Gentile, or all non-Jews. These are people whose behavior is not wicked and obviously sinful. Here we find people who are decent citizens.

So the second example of sinful mankind is the man or woman who has a nice religious façade. They are decent members of their community. This is the one who rejects the gospel the self-righteous moralist, good living and clean cut. This person looks good from the outside but inwardly he is envious, resentful, and jealous and so his attitudes are as wrong as the one who is outwardly evil. Do you know this person? I was once this person.

No doubt the Jews reading this for the first time thought to themselves that they were exempt from condemnation because God had long ago separated them and given them His commandments.

They more or less obeyed these but their teachers had added huge lists of dos and don'ts and essentially taken away the spirit of the law or the motive of obedience out of love for God. If you can reduce your Christian life to a list of rules and be convinced that if you follow those you are OK, then the enemy has you right where he wants you.

Paul has painted a picture of what happens to mankind without God, those who are wicked and suppress the knowledge of God. Now he is going to switch and talk about those who are willing to recognize God's existence and perhaps obey some of His laws. This person almost always is self righteous as he looks around at the heathen who are not obeying the rules as he understands them.

So for our purposes today we can think "church goer" as well as Jew in Paul's case against mankind.

Romans 2:1

The Jewish critic of the Gentile assumed he was free from guilt as described in chapter 1 because the Jew thought that their national heritage or being of the Jewish race was all they needed to be saved. In contrast to this, just look at John the Baptist's statement to this belief in Matthew 3:9 "do not suppose you can say to yourselves we have Abraham for our father; for

I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. This statement came after John so lovingly called them a "brood of vipers" and said they should live by their own rules they were making for others.

The Jews went to great lengths to separate themselves from Gentiles who were considered unclean, so when Paul finished his list of the sins of those unclean gentiles he knew the Jews were going to say they were terrible and should be punished. Paul then said the Jews were just as bad as the Gentiles, they were not guiltless and have no excuse their attitude of self righteousness condemned others but overlooked their own sin.

Have you ever fallen into this trap?

You find yourself judging the behavior of another person because they are indulging in some sin you find repellant whereas you are indulging in something as bad? Just think back about our list of sins at the end of chapter 1. We saw a list which included murder, envy, strife, slander, gossip, insolent, arrogant, boastful, haters of God. Now this list appears to be behaviors that are not equally sinful God listed "gossip" right along with murder. Its always dangerous to judge the heart of another person, that is the providence of God. We can look at the fruit of their life however and that will help us decide whether this is a person who is trustworthy. Check out the list of good fruit in Galatians 5:22-23.

Romans 2:2-3

Now we get to the heart of it. Paul is assuming that people will condemn those who are indulging in the sin of Romans 1:28-32 they even have decided that God condemned those folks. However human judgment is based on prejudice and partial knowledge, God's judgment is perfect, it's based on truth and what He sees as our motives.

God judges us by what we do, beginning by what we do about Jesus and there is no doubt friends, He will punish sinners and when God condemns there is no appeal. So Paul is saying plainly to the Jews when they judge others and then commit the same sins God will judge them accordingly.

Because this religious person maintains an outward appearance of respectability he thinks God is going to overlook his inner sinful thinking and motives.

Romans 2:4

Here is the crux of the matter friends, God wants everyone to be saved and He has made the way for that to happen. God is kind, He has given us life, the creation. God has been patient and tolerant, He postpones punishment in order to give us time to repent. You see Paul was concerned about the Jews because they thought their special status as the chosen people gave them a pass and they were unwilling to repent of sin. What does it mean to think "lightly" of the riches of God's kindness and patience? Friends, most of other places in the NT this word lightly is translated "despise". Then the word "riches" means "abundant". God is being abundantly kind and patient with our sin and what do we do? We despise His kindness. His ways are not our ways are they? You would think He would squash us like a bug but no, He continues to tolerate our waywardness and love us and draw us to Himself. Not only does He have patience with us He sent His Son to take our punishment, the punishment we rightfully deserve.

Now this kindness is meant by God to lead us to repentance. Remember the word "repentance" is a military term meaning "right about face". That is we turn from doing it our way, and say yes to God.

When I repent I say; I agree with you God, I am a sinner, you are right, I am wrong.

Romans 2:5-6

We see the person who cannot see anything wrong with what he is doing, of course, that is natural man in all his arrogance, he just sees what is wrong with other people. Did you ever notice how easy it is to see the sin in other people's lives and not notice your own sin?

Jesus condemned this behavior when He said "you are worried about a tiny splinter in your brother's eye when you have a huge piece of lumber in your own".

Are you stubborn and unrepentant? These verses say God is storing up wrath for the day when He reveals His own righteousness and judgment. This is a day already scheduled, there will be a judgment day. All will be accountable for the truth that was available to them and what they did with it. You will be accountable for the truth you heard today. The safe thing to do is to pray and ask God what He wants you to do about it.

Romans 2:7

Real faith in Christ generates the desire to do good works to honor Him. Good works will not get you to heaven; good works are the expression of your salvation and love for Him.

In the end we will all be rewarded for the way we lived our lives. Those who do not want anything to do with God will get their wish and they will spend their eternity separated from Him, this is the second death. The first death separates us from this earthly life and our flesh; the second death separates us from God.

If you love the LORD and want to please Him, then your reward will be great, just as He promised.

Perhaps you are one who wants it both ways; you would like to have eternal life but as for right now you want to have it all your way, submitting to the Lordship of Christ is not a part of your life. If you have asked Jesus to save you the next step is to submit to His reign in your life "Thy will be done".

Romans 2:8

This self-confident, self-righteous person who has turned away from God is all about himself and what he wants, this is who Paul is addressing. God's anger and wrath are promised to this person.

Romans 2:9-11

Here is the final statement; there will be no partiality when it comes to God's judgment; Jew and Greek or Gentile will be judged according to God's standard, the first being, what did you do about Jesus. The self-righteous Jews who thought that being Jewish gave them a pass and went right on sinning, they are promised judgment. This applies to any self-righteous person who believes that their church or religious tradition will save their souls. It is obvious here that is false and I sincerely hope you are not deceived by this. Before I came to understand salvation in Christ I was a member of a church, which taught me that membership there was all I needed and was a sure passport to heaven. There is no scripture to support that creed, in fact, Paul makes it clear right here that is false doctrine and will lead to eternal separation from God. How grateful I am for the kindness of God Who revealed the truth to me.

Now we come to the third type of person who is lost and that is the pagan, the unenlightened and we touched on this person last week. We said he has the creation to show him God's invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature.

He has never heard the gospel.

Romans 2:12-13

Gentiles will not be judged because they did not keep the law, they will be judged for the sin, which is listed in Romans 1. Jews will be judged in exactly the same way, if they sinned and did not repent being Jewish and having the law will not make them righteous. The same will be

true for the self-righteous church goer who has no personal relationship with Jesus, just a façade of religion.

Just hearing the law read will not justify anyone; we must be ready to obey the law.

So now this pagan who has never heard the gospel, never seen the bible, what has God done for him to draw him to Jesus?

He has a conscience, which God says he defiles by his pagan practices.

The fourth kind of lost person is the one who knows he needs God and he seeks deliverance from the judgment of God by religious practices, rituals, performances and knowledge of truth.

These last two sum up the universal lostness of mankind.

Now we have been told in verse two that God judges on the basis of several things; first is truth. He does not accuse falsely but judges on what is there, what is realistic. Then in verse 6 of this chapter we see that God judges according to works. God is patient to let men work out their lives and see whether they will seek Him. He sees our motives and inner attitudes and waits to see how these will work themselves out in our lives.

It should be clear to you what is inside as you see what is coming out of your heart. Are your attitudes, thoughts, actions, choices of entertainment, etc. those of a person whose heart has been purified? There will be degrees of punishment, but the lake of fire for all who have not bowed the knee to Jesus as Savior and Lord.

In addition we see that God judges on the "light" a person has been given. Paul says, "All who sin apart from the Law perish apart from the Law". The fact that men never hear the 10 Commandments or anything else in the bible does not mean they are going to be acceptable in God's sight. They perish because they knew what was right, they did not do it.

Romans 2:14-15

These verses could be in parenthesis because they are part of the argument or statement of the previous verses. Here Paul tells of those living in his day who said that because the Jews possessed the Law and knew God's truth, they would not be condemned in that judgment. But Paul is saying "Hold it, if your knowledge of the truth saves then everybody will be saved, even the pagans for they show that they have a law too. They know a Law, it is written on their hearts, and their consciences act as judges within them. That is right friends, God wrote on our hearts a sense of right and wrong. So as Paul said, we are without excuse. Do you let your conscience be your guide?

You will alternately feel good about yourself and bad about yourself.

Romans 2:17-22

We read about the Jew here in the bible but lets bring it into today and refer to the church member. Paul said the Jew of his day thought they had a great advantage because they had the Law. We have access to the bible in many translations; most people have several in their homes. So if you think having the bible available is an advantage keep listening.

Now the Jews also bragged about their relationship to God, they had a special inside track they thought. And maybe you think that because you are an American with a bible and you go to church fairly often you have an advantage with God.

We read here the Jews were people who knew the will of God, they had the 10 commandments and other scriptures and the knowledge of what God wanted.

Are you relying on your knowledge of the bible?

Fourthly we see the Jew approved what was essential or superior, they rejected certain attitudes and behaviors. Are you counting on God being impressed with what you don't do? Many church members like to tell you what they don't do. They don't drink coffee or dance, or go to movies.

Last the Jews were instructed in the Law. Many had long passages memorized and took pride in that. There is nothing wrong with the things we have discussed its just that you cannot depend on them for righteousness.

Paul tells of the privileges the Jews thought they had and perhaps this applies to you and me.

They thought they were a guide to the blind, always correcting everyone else, always right.

Secondly the Jews felt they were light to those in the dark. Some were among those who love to dazzle you with their knowledge of the bible; they knew everything about everything in the bible.

Third the Jews, Paul said, were convinced they were the instructors of the foolish.

Fourth the Jews felt they had a great privilege because they taught children. There are certainly rewards for those who spend time in the challenging task of teaching young ones the truth of the bible but here were are talking about people whose egos were puffed up because of this service.

Are you getting the impression that pride here is the motive for the service of these Jewish people or in our illustration the "church member".

It sounds like these folks think they have a special "in" with God because of all the activities of service.

Paul's conclusion is that they are guilty, just as guilty as the first people we talked about. Outwardly righteous and correct but inside there is something wrong.

Romans 2;23-24

Paul is saying they may be obedient to the LAW but inside they are full of sin; envious proud, covetous, lustful. They were judging others but sinning themselves. Hypocrites. Jesus said they were white washed tombs. Appearing clean on the outside but full of dead men's bones, which means they were unclean inside.

They bragged about the Law and their superior position but Paul said they proudly boast of being so great and religious but their lives were so bad that they were blaspheming God. In other words, people were turning away from God because of their behavior. What an indictment

Does your life match your belief system, are you walking your talk, are you drawing people to Jesus by your attitudes and activities?

Summing up these verses are talking to us about all the ideas men can have about how they are OK with God by their own accounting based on their religious traditions, racial background, good works. We will soon see that none of these give us the righteousness needed to have the reward of eternal life.

This is a difficult place to end today but we are out of time. Next week we will complete the second chapter of Romans but we are not finished hearing about the sinfulness of men. However, next week, the remedy is going to become clear and also the amazing grace of our wonderful heavenly Father.