

Even “Good People” are Guilty Before God

Romans 2:1-5

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Background Notes

The epistle to the Romans contains a wonderful systematic presentation of the gospel of God. The gospel -- the good news -- is that a holy and righteous God can save unholy and unrighteous people. That's us! That includes you and that includes me.

The first step in this systematic presentation of the gospel of God is to show that **all** the world is guilty before God -- regardless of religious background, regardless of cultural background, regardless of education or training, regardless of good works, regardless of anything! **Everyone is guilty** before a holy and righteous God. Apart from salvation in Christ, everyone is guilty and therefore under the judgment of God.

But what about the person who does not have a Bible and has never heard about Christ? What about the pagan and the heathen who haven't had a chance? What about them? Romans 1 answers that question. What is the answer? The answer is this: God doesn't condemn people for ignorance -- but no person is ignorant. God doesn't condemn people for ignorance, but no person is ignorant. In Romans 1:20 we read that **no one** has an excuse. Why? Because God has revealed Himself and His truth in creation, with enough evidence for everyone to respond to the true God. Unfortunately, the majority of people reject the evidence that God has given -- not everyone, but most people. Just as most people in America today who have heard the gospel reject the simple gospel of Jesus Christ, so most people down through human history have rejected or turned away from the light that God has given them.

Romans 1:18 says that people don't only reject the truth -- they **suppress** it! They hold it down! For example, many people today would rather believe that the universe is eternal, or it created itself out of nothing. They would rather believe that than accept the **obvious** evidence that there must be a Creator. They're holding down the truth. They not only reject the truth of God for themselves -- they hold down the clear evidence! They suppress it in unrighteousness.

Now what about the person that says, "Hey, I believe in God. I'm not a pagan! I do the best I can -- I live by my conscience. I'm an upright citizen and I help my fellow man. I'm civilized and refined and moral. Certainly I'm not guilty before God, am I?" Well, the first part of Romans 2 is all about these people. Upright and moral people are also guilty before God.

Doctrinal Points

1. Moral people are guilty before God because they don't live up to their own standards.

Verses 1-3 once again: *"Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?"*

Do you see the point? The point here is that moral people may have higher standards than other people. They're not barbarians or pagans, and they may have higher moral standards than other people. However, they condemn themselves every time they judge someone else by their own high moral standards -- unless they keep and live out those standards perfectly themselves!

Here's an illustration. When I was working as a research engineer, I remember coming into work late a number of times. I would justify this action by telling myself that, "Hey, I'm a professional engineer. I'm not required to punch the clock like some of the other employees. And after all, sometimes I work late -- I put in extra time after hours." Well, I remember one morning I was looking out the window at work, and I saw one of my colleagues, another engineer, coming in to work late. I will never forget the feeling I had toward him at that time. I was thinking, "That scoundrel! He's cheating the company by coming in late!" Then I realized what I had just done! According to Romans 2, I had just condemned myself! I had failed my own standards!

It happens all the time with so-called upright and moral people -- and not just in matters of cheating the employer out of some time. I'm sure you could share with me many other examples that you're aware of. Moral people are guilty before God because they don't live up to their own standards.

2. Moral people are guilty before God because they don't acknowledge the grace of God.

Verse 4: *"Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?"*

Moral people don't acknowledge the grace of God because they think they're good enough on their own, and they don't need the grace of God. Just a few weeks ago I talked with a man who said that he believed that Hitler would be in hell, along with a few other evil people -- but not most people, including himself! He considered himself upright and moral and a pretty good guy. This man will not acknowledge his need for the grace of God. He thinks that because everything is going reasonably well in his life and he is in good health that God is approving of him. Verse 4 says that the reason that things are going reasonably well for him is because God is patient! He is "forbearing and long suffering," giving him time to repent. But right now that man is despising or looking down on the grace of God. *"...do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?"*

People who consider themselves to be upright and moral won't acknowledge the grace of God because they think they're good enough on their own, and they don't need the grace of God. Moral people are guilty before God, because they don't acknowledge the grace of God.

3. Moral people are guilty before God because they don't admit they are wrong.

Verse 5: *"But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God..."*

Many moral people refuse to admit that they're wrong -- even when they're confronted with their shortcomings and inconsistencies! Rather than admit that they're wrong, they compare themselves with people with whom they consider inferior, or they change the standards relative to their situation. They say or do whatever it takes so they don't have to admit that they're wrong! We see examples of that all around us today, even people in high public office -- these people claim to be upright and moral, even go to church and carry a Bible, but they operate on a totally different set of moral standards than the Bible teaches.

Last week our daughter-in-law was telling us of a situation where she works, in which a top executive had fired some people for unethical behavior. But now it has come out that he himself has been guilty of unethical behavior! Of course, he won't admit that he's wrong. And I'm sure you could come up with other similar examples.

The bottom line here is that people who consider themselves to be upright and moral will **not** admit they're wrong. They harden their hearts and stay on their moral pedestal. They will not repent. They are like the Pharisees of our Lord's day. Moral people are guilty before God because they don't admit they are wrong.

Practical Application

Would you live below a dam that was about to break?

Of course you say, "That would be crazy!" Yes, that would be crazy! But just suppose your home is located in a beautiful valley. At the head of the valley there's a huge dam. Because of recent rains the waters behind the dam are rising, and the structural engineers and authorities have determined that the dam is unstable and could give way at any time. But your house looks so good -- it looks so well-built and secure! What would you do? Would you believe that the comfortable, good looking house you have built can withstand the flood from a broken dam? I hope that you would do what I would do -- get out of there before it's too late!

Now if you consider the rising waters in this illustration as the wrath of God, you have a good spiritual picture of what verse 5 is telling us: "*But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God...*" It's only a matter of time before the dam gives way and the flood of God's wrath sweeps away all those who **think** they're doing just fine, who have not and will not repent of their sins! This includes the proud, the hypocritical, the unrepentant, the self-righteous moralists.

I trust everyone hearing this Talk has believed the truth about their sinful condition, and has escaped God's wrath upon sin by coming to Him in repentance and receiving salvation in Christ. The question about the dam may not apply to us, but maybe you can share this question with your unbelieving, non-Christian friends. Turn to Romans 2:5 and ask them, "Would you live below a dam that was about to break?"