

"Four Mistakes Religious People Make"

Romans 2:1-11

I. Introduction

- A. The hardest people to reach with the gospel are religious people, because they can't see their own need for Christ
 - 1. Those who are morally bankrupt and have hit rock bottom know they need help; people who have religion and religious ceremonies often do not
 - 2. Religion can cover a multitude of sins; it can become a mask worn by hypocrites
- B. In Romans 2, Paul began to address the religious person—the moralist—who lives by some kind of code
 - 1. In chapter 1, Paul introduced the gospel and how we can get right with God
 - 2. Paul said that first, each person needs to know how not right with God they are—they need to hear the bad news before they can grasp and appreciate the good news
 - 3. The bad news, the wrath of God, was introduced in 1:18
- C. There are those who don't know the bad news; they don't think they need a doctor because they have already diagnosed themselves
 - 1. Who was Paul speaking to?
 - a. Religious people—either Jews or very moral Greeks and Romans
 - b. Romans 1:28-32
 - 2. Who would fit in this category today?
 - a. Any unsaved person who is hiding behind religion or morality
 - b. The self-righteous—those who trust in ritual observances or anything other than Christ alone for their eternal safety
 - c. This person is moral, friendly, and charitable, but self-satisfied and unsaved
 - 3. No one can be saved until they realize we're all guilty and we all need God's solution in Christ

II. Blame: *Pointing the finger but not perceiving the heart* (vv. 1-2)

- A. You can point your finger, but you can't pinpoint the heart
 - 1. All human judgment is skewed and distorted because we don't know all the details of the situation and the motives of the heart
 - 2. How often do we misjudge people anyway?
 - 3. Luke 18:9-14
- B. Only God judges according to truth
 - 1. Truth is part of God's nature
 - 2. He is omniscient—there's nothing He doesn't know
 - a. Psalm 139:1-6
 - b. Acts 15:8
 - c. 1 Kings 8:39
 - d. Revelation 2:23

3. Rather than being fault-finders, we need to realize that God is the only one qualified to point the finger at all
- III. Brashness: *Sitting as A judge while standing before THE Judge* (v. 3)
- A. Some pious people are experts at evaluating others
 1. They have forgotten that they are being evaluated by God
 2. "What we are often doing is seeing our own faults in others and judging them vicariously. That way, we experience the pleasure of self-righteousness without the pain of penitence" —John Stott
 - B. The problem is in our thinking
 1. The Greek word for *think* here is *logizomai*, which means to estimate, evaluate, or calculate
 2. A religious person calculates, but wrongly; he's logical, but he's not theological, so his logic is skewed
 - a. He evaluates people and their lifestyles, as well as his own life, but he does it falsely because he's self-righteous
 - b. The self-righteous person is always underestimating God's perfection and overestimating their own
 - c. Hebrews 4:13
 - d. 2 Corinthians 5:10
 - C. The secret hope of the hypocrite is that God will judge them by a lower standard
 1. Our fallen nature tends to justify our own sins
 2. This is not a call to suspend analytical judgment and discernment, but a reminder not to take God's place as judge, condemning others without examining yourself
 3. Romans 3:23
- IV. Bitterness: *Hating people's badness over loving God's goodness* (v. 4)
- A. Religious people love to focus on people's badness rather than God's goodness
 1. They focus on the nature of the world rather than the nature of God
 2. Paul used the word *despise*, which means to scorn, look down upon, or undervalue
 3. They undervalue God's patience, which Paul described using several colorful words:
 - a. Forbearance
 - i. Withholding judgment; God calls a temporary truce
 - ii. Noah built the ark and preached to the people for 120 years
 - iii. God sent prophet after prophet for 800 years before the Babylonian exile
 - b. Longsuffering
 - i. The Greek word is *makrothumeó*, which means large, great anger
 - ii. When used in reference to God, it means that God has an incredible capacity to store up anger before He lets it spill out in judgment
 - c. Goodness
 - i. The English word *good* comes from the Anglo-Saxon word for God, which meant *the good*
 - ii. Goodness is God's nature
 - B. Some people despise the goodness of God
 1. How could God ever forgive something so bad?

2. Ted Bundy came to faith before his death, and people hated the notion that God could, or ever would, forgive such badness
 3. The religious leaders were not happy about Jesus' forgiveness
- C. Why is God so good?
1. Paul answered this question in verse 4: to lead us to repentance
 2. 2 Peter 3:9
 3. God isn't being lenient when He waits to judge; He's being patient
 4. He's not winking at the sinner; He's waiting for them to change their mind
- D. Before you hate people's badness and the world's wickedness over loving God's goodness, ask yourself one thing: Was God patient with your ignorance and your rebellion?
- V. Blindness: *Beholding others' sin; being blind to their own* (vv. 5-11)
- A. This passage uncovers the human tendency to be hard in our judgment of others but soft in our judgment of ourselves
1. Sometimes, this isn't righteous indignation, but self-righteous indignation
 2. This kind of blindness—noticing others' problems and failures without acknowledging your own—reveals a hard heart
 3. The word used for *hardness* is *sklērotēta*
 - a. This is where we get the word *sclerosis*
 - b. This is the hardening of one's spiritual heart—becoming unresponsive to God, which is much worse than arteriosclerosis
 - c. Most people who have arteriosclerosis don't know they have it; the first symptom is a heart attack
- B. Most people do not know their own spiritual condition
1. Hardening of the arteries may send you to your grave
 2. The hardening of your spiritual heart will send you to hell
- VI. Conclusion
- A. This is the mask religious people hide behind
1. Paul exposed this mask because he wanted everyone to know we're saved by grace
 2. The good news is that all who call upon Him will be saved
 3. Paul was honest about his own sin (see 1 Timothy 1:15)
- B. The essence of the good news is that God extends grace to unworthy people, and we are all unworthy
1. You can't hide behind your religious background
 2. You can't hide behind your rituals

Figures referenced: Ted Bundy, John Stott

Cross references: 1 Kings 8:39; Psalm 139:1-6; Luke 18:9-14; John 8:11; Acts 15:8; Romans 1:18, 28-32; 3:23; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Timothy 1:15; Hebrews 4:13; 2 Peter 3:9; Revelation 2:23

Greek words: logizomai, makrothumeó, sklērotēta

Topic: the wrath of God

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