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The Recipients of the Wrath of God: The Moral Religious, Part 2

Romans 2:1-5, "Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For ^gin passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. ² We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. ³ Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? ⁴ Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? ⁵ But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed." ¹

Romans 2:17-29, " But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God ¹⁸ and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law; ¹⁹ and if you are sure that you yourself are ^ea guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, ²⁰ an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth— ²¹ you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? ²² You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³ You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. ²⁴ For, as

¹ *The Holy Bible : English standard version*. 2001. Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

²⁵ For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. ²⁶ So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded² as circumcision? ²⁷ Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code³ and circumcision but break the law. ²⁸ For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. ²⁹ But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God." ²

Refuge from a Hurricane

In August of 1992, Hurricane Andrew ripped through south Florida, into the Gulf of Mexico, and then into Louisiana leaving destruction and misery in its path. As one who lived in the very place eight years after the hurricane hit, Homestead, Florida, I saw the awful results both in picture and in person. Folks in the church would occasionally pull out their scrap book and show us their photos. Places which we they had known were just not there. Whole communities were wiped off the map. I specifically recall a picture of a fence post in which hay had been lodged. There was devastation everywhere; destroyed homes, and ruined lives.

One of the questions that come to mind when viewing the footage of destruction is this: "Where do you go for refuge at a time like that?" Experts tell us that one of the safest places to be in a hurricane is in a bathroom or bathtub. And yet, during Hurricane Andrew even these places proved to be inadequate. Whole communities were nothing but foundations. Those who sought refuge in these homes met certain destruction!

Whether you realize it or not, there is a storm on the horizon of each and every one of our lives.

2 Peter 3:7, "But the present heavens and earth by His word are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men."- truly, the final judgment is coming! You say, "I don't think I'll live that long."

Hebrew 9:27, "And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment..."- truly the final judgment is on the horizon of every one's life!

Where will you and I go for refuge when the storm hits? Many today answer this by ignoring it, reasoning that if they don't think of it, it might go away. We see it in the mantra which will be heard in the last day.

1 Thessalonians 5:3, "While they are saying, 'Peace and safety!' then destruction will come upon them suddenly..."

Others, not believing that the storm is real, don't bother themselves with the question. These are the ones spoken about in.

2 Peter 3:3-5, "Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with *their* mocking,

² *The Holy Bible : English standard version*. 2001. Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

following after their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.'"

Still others answer this by taking refuge in the "strong and sturdy house" of good works, not realizing that even the most well-built home of self effort won't stand a chance against the awesome power of God's wrath!

Matthew 7:22-23: "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'"

Our text is a description of those in the last group. Those who seek refuge from the wrath of God in a house of good works! In the first three chapters of this epistle Paul discusses the wrath of God for the sole purpose of showing that all need the righteousness which only comes from Christ.³ In Romans 1:19-32 Paul discusses God's wrath as it relates to the Gentile the representative of immoral religion. Here we saw that the degrading and destructive consequences of their religion not only incur but also reflect the judgment of God.

In Romans 2:1-29 Paul shifts his focus to the Jew, the epitome of morally upright religion. We have seen that the basis upon which the morally upright men receive God's wrath is that they are hypocrites. They know God's Wrath is against those who sin. They use this truth to judge others. Nevertheless they fail to judge themselves, and so practice the same sin as the Gentiles which they condemn.

How could these religious individuals be so blind? We are going to answer this as we consider the catalyst for the morally upright's hypocrisy; their presumption.⁴

Their Presumption

Romans 2:3, "do you suppose this, O man."

The word for "suppose" originally was a math term used to denote counting. We get our English word "logic" from this word. Now outside of a math setting the word came to mean, "to take into account, reckon, or consider." Accordingly, Paul is saying to his fellow Jews, "Reason with me on this one..."

Romans 2:3, "and do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment upon those who practice such things."

Again, this is in reference to verse 2 and the Jew's whole-hearted agreement with Paul regarding the ramifications of the Gentile's sin; that they are under God's wrath and judgment.⁵ The Jews rightly judged or discerned that because of the revelation of God the Gentile stands condemned for his sin!

Romans 2:3, "and so you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment upon those who practice such things and do the same yourself."

³ Compare Romans 1:17; 3:21

⁴ Compare Romans 2:3-5

⁵ Compare Romans 1:18-32

As we saw last time, while the Jew may not have been guilty of the same sins as were the Gentiles, they nevertheless were guilty of the same sin! While the Jew didn't physically bow before an idol as did the Gentile, they were guilty of worshipping the idol of...

- Power, John 5.
- Money, Mark 7.
- Glory, Matthew 23:6.
- Self, Matthew 23:12.
- While they were not addicted to alcohol or drugs as perhaps many of the Gentiles were in their day, they were addicted to the praises of men, Matthew 23:5-7.

Truly, the Jew was guilty of the very sin which they knew merited wrath and condemnation before God in every Gentile community. Paul saw it clearly. He challenged his countrymen with a very important question; "do you suppose...that you will escape the judgment of God?" (Romans 2:3)

The implied answer here is "YES." While the Jew participated in the same sin as did the Gentile, they nevertheless and incredibly presumed that they would not receive the wrath of God. How can this be? Were the Jews of Paul's day mad?

The Jews of Paul's day were not mad, just DECEIVED. We see hints of this in the wording of this verse. "You" is in the emphatic position-> "Do you think that YOU, A JEW will escape the judgment of God?"

The implication is that something about their status as a Jew made them PRESUME that they were immune to the judgment of God. And clearly that "something" was their HERITAGE. The typical Jew of Paul's day understood salvation as an issue of WHO you were. For example:

Matthew 3:7, 9, "But when he [John the baptizer] saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, 'You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?... and do you suppose that you can say to yourselves, "We have Abraham for our father"; for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.'"

The Jews responding to Christ's implied accusation that they were enslaved to Satan answered this way:

John 8:33, "We are Abraham's offspring..."

The Jews looked to Abraham as we look to Christ. According to their doctrine, to be a child of Abraham on account of circumcision meant that the Jew was guaranteed God's good pleasure. In the Book of Wisdom, a deuterocanonical book accepted by the Jews of Christ's day as Scripture/Hagaddah⁶, says this:

The Book of Wisdom 15:2, "...even if we sin we are thine."

The Jew thought of himself and his nation as the community of the saved. And although they knew that

⁶ Judaism separated their scriptures into two categories: Halakah which was morally binding and Hagaddah which was suggestive and so given to inspire and edify.

God's judgment is according to truth,⁷ nevertheless they thought that they would be judged differently than the nations on account of their national and ecclesiastical relations- they were Children of Abraham! John Murray put it this way:

The presumptuous Jew interpreted the special goodness of God to him as the guarantee of immunity from the criteria by which other men would be judged... the Gentile needed repentance but not he.(Murray March 1, 1997, 60)

The first catalyst that leads to the condemnation of the morally upright is their presumption. Though they were guilty of the same sin as the Gentiles, the Jew of Paul's day presumed that their STATUS as Abraham's children protected them from God's wrath. And lest you think that the Jewish mentality of Paul's day is silly, this is the thinking of many in our day. The wrath of God is coming, but...

- *I've been baptized.*
- *I'm a member of a church. In fact, I was a charter member!*
- *I'm an officer.*
- *I've served on counsels and boards.*
- *I've gone to the mission field.*
- *I'm an eighth generation Christian.*

Thus God wouldn't condemn me! This is the presumption of many in the church. Because of our offices, positions, or heritage we presume we are saved! What a shock it will be for many who so presume when they hear Christ's awful voice.

Matthew 7:23, "...Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness."

This is but a third of it. Notice the second reason for the hypocrisy found in morally upright religious is their persuasion.

Their Persuasion

Romans 2:4, "or do you think lightly of the riches [or "the abundance"] of His kindness and forbearance and patience."

Consider each of the blessings of God which those in a morally upright religion "take lightly."

- His kindness. This is not the attribute by which God is good, but by which He does good. It refers to the benefits God gives. Throughout redemptive history the Jew had been the recipient of God's over-flowing and abundant kindness! For example, speaking of the Jew Paul wrote this:

Romans 9:4-5a, "...to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ..."

Truly, God had been kind to His people. They had received so much from Him on account of the

⁷ Compare Romans 2:2

covenant. In Abraham they went from the idolatrous culture of Ur to being servants of the living God and so receiving from Him so much good! Yet all of this was for naught for they took it for granted! Another blessing which they took for granted was...

- His forbearance. The word for “forbear” literally means “to hold back.” It is not forgiveness *per se*, but the suspension of a penalty. Accordingly, it points to a truce, not a peace! It implies a temporary “cease-fire” and so a limit. That God forbears means that He does not punish the sinner immediately after he sins.

Such was another blessing which the Jew received from God. Read Psalm 106 and the history of God’s forbearance with Israel. Why was God so patient? He was forbearing that His people might repent of their sin and turn to the Christ.⁸ Yet the Jew missed this and so took God’s grace for granted as if because of their heritage they deserved God’s patience. Another blessing taken for granted was God’s.

- His patience. The word used for patience literally means “long in temper” as opposed to short in temper. It implies the ability to bear long in the face of opposition, and refers to the duration of God’s forbearance and kindness.

Each of these graces was granted the Jews/the people of God throughout redemptive history that they might turn from their sin and trust in the Christ. Yet rather than enjoy these graces, again the Jew took them lightly as if these graces were something they deserved.

Romans 2:4, "or do you think lightly of the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience."

To “think lightly of” means to “think down on.” It is to underestimate the significance of someone or something, to think vainly of it, and thus fail to accord it the esteem that is its due. The word verges on scorning. Now in what way did the Jews of Paul’s day take God’s attributes of mercy lightly? How did they scorn the graces of the Lord? Consider, because of their morally upright life the Jew escaped the temporal manifestation of God’s wrath that was and is given to the Gentile. They weren’t a recipient of God’s temporal wrath. They had not been abandoned by God to a life of immorality.⁹ They were “God’s people,” members of the household of God, and they knew it.

And thus on account of the absence of God’s temporal wrath and the he riches of God’s kindness, forbearance, and patience they concluded, no doubt again because of their heritage, that God must not be angry with them, but rather was well-pleased!

And so, when it came to God’s attributes of mercy, the Jew failed to consider them in reference to themselves; they took them lightly! And so rather than responding to God’s mercy with loving devotion, these morally upright men and women snubbed it and remained in ignorance. Paul continued...

Romans 2:4, "not knowing [this principle] that the kindness of God leads you to repentance."

The word for “repentance” refers to “a change in mind,” and so a turning from the love and service of

⁸ Compare 2 Peter 3:9

⁹ Compare Romans 1:22-32

sin and self unto the active service and love of God and His glory. It is a turning from a commitment to one's own righteousness as the means to please the Lord unto a reliance upon the righteousness of Christ alone.

Oh family of God, let us see that the absence of God's temporal wrath is not an indication of God's approval of us, but an opportunity for all men- including you and me- to turn from their life of sin unto the service of God! Times of ease are not given as a reward so that we might indulge ourselves, but that we might do that which is necessary to serve the Lord all the more! Peter put it this way:

2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."

When you read all, you must include yourself in this designation!

Psalm 90:12, "So teach us to number our days, that we may present to Thee a heart of wisdom."

And so the second catalyst that leads to the condemnation of the morally upright (the second cause of their hypocrisy) is their persuasion that God's attributes of mercy are in reference to everyone else but themselves. Why should they need God's kindness, forbearance, and patience? Why should they repent from their sin? They have...

- Abraham.
- An office.
- A ministry.
- A service.
- A status.
- A membership.

And with these, God's good pleasure! They don't need grace! Truly the coming storm will catch many in the church off-guard on account of the persuasion that blessing is a testimony of approval. That's the second catalyst. Notice the third, their posture.

Their Posture

Romans 2:5, "but because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart."

With this Paul highlights another error in the thinking of the morally upright who in the end are condemned. It's their posture, because of their stubbornness. That which is stubborn literally is something that is "hard to the touch or rough." Hence a "stubborn heart" is a disposition which has become calloused.

And that is so many amongst the morally upright. They've heard religious appeals so often (they've even summoned them) that the idea of their need for repentance from the sins named among the Gentiles is ludicrous. They have not nor will they ever be bound by these.

Romans 2:5, "but because of your... unrepentant heart."

This is the opposite of the “repentance” referenced in Romans 2:4. And so rather than turning from their self-reliance unto reliance upon Christ, the morally upright condemned remain self-dependant. Now both of these postures are used here in reference to their “heart” which refers to the essence of their being.

In other words, Paul’s description in this verse is not an error into which the morally religious of his day *occasionally* fell. It was their disposition down to their core, and hence their posture toward God. When it came to

- Conviction on account of sin.
- The call to turn from idols to serve the living and true God.
- The need for repentance and so reliance upon another for their salvation.

Many of the Jews of Paul’s day turned a deaf ear! The message was unable to penetrate their hard heart! In fact here we are brought to the crux of the issue. The Jew who (1) agrees that God’s wrath against the Gentile is just and (2) is guilty of the same sin as the Gentile, and yet (3) refuses to turn from their sin unto God does so NOT ultimately because of poor theology, “We’re Abraham’s children; God is well-pleased with us!” (this is the felt/observable cause) BUT because they have a heart that loves sin and therefore refuses to give it up. That’s always the case; listen again to Peter’s warning.

2 Peter 3:3-4, “Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with *their* mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For *ever* since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.’”

Why ultimately do these mockers make light of the message of judgment? Because of the sinful desires in their hearts! They reject God NOT because of a lack of evidence or misinformation, BUT because of their love of sin! THIS IS WHY EACH AND EVERYONE IN THIS ROOM SIN!

Such was the case for the Jew of Paul’s day. Their morally upright religion was nothing more than a cover or band-aid for the activities of their evil heart! Though they said the right words and so fooled many, God was and is not impressed! Accordingly, on the last day they will receive a greater condemnation than the Gentile, the ones they were so quick to judge!

The third and final catalyst that leads to the morally upright's condemnation is their posture. They have a hard heart in love with sinning! Though their lives look clean and in good order, their hearts are hard when it came to the love of God and His service! And for this calloused and hard heart, the morally upright justly receives the wrath of God!

Now this brings us to the present and the all important question, “What does this text say to me?”

Before we proceed, I want to remind everyone that your presence in church indicates that you are a participant in a morally upright religion. See...

- The Jews of our day.
- The Pharisees of our day.
- The Morally Upright Religious of our day.

These reside in the church! Thus, we must take this text as a direct exhortation to ourselves! With this in mind and based on our text, let me ask you some very important questions:

- Do you presume that you are innocent?
- Do you compare your life to others and conclude that you're not that bad?
- Are you persuaded that on account of your status God is well-pleased with you?
- Do you weigh your sin in the balance of humanity and declare that the God of love must approve of you?

However you may answer, don't miss the point of this text! If you stand today before God guilty of just one sin, if you are guilty of just one...

- Bad thought.
- Outburst of anger.
- Lie.
- Surely word.

Then regardless of how virtuous the rest of your life has been:

- All your praying.
- All your reading of God's word.
- Your church attendance.
- Your service in the church.
- How Morally Upright you have been.

In the day of God's final judgment you will be a recipient of the wrath of God! And because you sat under the preaching of the word of God you will be judged more harshly than the gentile.

Romans 2:11-12, "For there is no partiality with God. For all who have sinned without the Law [the Gentile] will also perish without the Law [they will go to hell]; and all who have sinned under the Law [the Jew/Christian] will be judged by the Law [which denotes a harsher judgment]."

See, God doesn't grade on a curve! His standard of salvation is perfection! If you are not sinless, you will perish. If you stand guilty of one sin, you will be judged!

Matthew 5:48, "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

All who have fallen short of God's perfection in any way are considered in Scripture as the ungodly, and thus ought to consider the words of Peter as a promise to them:

2 Peter 3:7, "But the present heavens and earth by His word are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men."

But that brings us back to where we began, and the question, "Where can you go for refuge at a time like this?" Is there any place of refuge that can withstand the wrath of the Almighty God? Is there a

place in which we can be assured of safety?

The Bible tells of only one place... Jesus Christ! Exodus 11:1 tells God's word to all in Egypt- Jew and Gentile alike:

Exodus 11:4-6: "And Moses said, 'Thus says the Lord, "About midnight I am going out into the midst of Egypt, and all the first-born in the land of Egypt shall die, from the first-born of the Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the first-born of the slave girl who is behind the millstones [who were the slaves of Egypt? The People of God!]; all the first-born of the cattle as well. Moreover, there shall be a great cry in all the land of Egypt, such as there has not been *before* and such as shall never be again.'"

Moses announced to those in his day of a coming storm of judgment which we know now was a picture of the final judgment of God! But see the grace of God as He points the way of deliverance, the way of shelter. To the people of God's choosing, the Lord instructed Moses to say this:

Exodus 12:3, 7, 13: "7 On the tenth of this month they are each one to take a lamb for themselves, according to their fathers' households, a lamb for each household'... 7 Moreover, they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses in which they eat it... 13 And the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy *you* when I strike the land of Egypt."

The refuge that would protect any man from God's wrath in Moses' day was the blood of a Lamb. And do you know what? It is the same today!

Hebrews 9:24-26, "For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; nor was it that He should offer Himself often... but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself."

Now of this sacrifice, Paul wrote this:

1 Corinthians 5:7b, " ...for Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed."

And that is the point of this entire section. Notice where Paul is bringing us this morning in our passage.

Romans 3:21-22a, "But now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested [savingly], being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, [that is] *the* righteousness of God [which is granted] through faith in Jesus Christ..."

Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world¹⁰ And thus I ask you this: In the day of God's wrath and judgment on what basis will you stand before God? Will you stand before Him on the basis of your good works? Your position? Your righteous deeds? Then you will be utterly destroyed! Or, will you stand before Him on the basis of the work of Christ?

¹⁰ Compare John 1:29

There is only one shelter that will protect you from the wrath that your sins deserve: Jesus Christ!

Let us do so by re-affirming and re-confessing our love for Christ, His sacrifice, His righteousness as the only basis upon which God will accept us. And if you are one this day that stands guilty of sin- IOW you don't have a sacrifice for your sin- then...

- Go to God in prayer.
- Confess your need for the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ.
- Ask God to forgive you.
- And you shall be saved!

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About the Preacher

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