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The Recipients of the Wrath of God: The Moral Religious, Part 3

Romans 2:1-5, "Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in 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, ¹⁷ "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 a 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 (Ro 2:1–5). 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 regarded as circumcision? ²⁷ Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code 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. ²⁹

Facts on the Wrath of God

The “Wrath of God” is not a pleasant topic. Yet it is an important one. Of all doctrines, this is the most frequently spoken about topic in the gospels on the part of Christ. As such, we can’t afford to pass lightly over this teaching though that is our tendency.

Indeed! It is predicted that in the last days one of the primary responses to the teaching on God’s wrath will be to ignore it.

1 Thessalonians 5:2-3, [Paul said,] “For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying, ‘Peace and safety!’ then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.”

2 Peter 3:3-4, [Peter warned,] “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.’”

Such a response ought not to be named among the people of God. We who love God and love His word must embrace the whole counsel of God; including the unpleasant sections like the one we are examining. Heretofore we have been discussing the wrath of God as it rests upon the immoral religious³ and the moral religious.⁴ Now, in the case of the immoral religious we saw that the wrath of God results in their being given over to their sin; in essence to reap the consequences of their sin in their body. Accordingly when we look at the iniquity of the day, the wicked and evil practice which characterizes much of pagan religion we conclude that God’s wrath is real. Indeed: The immorality of the wicked not only will incur God’s judgment, but it is in fact a reflection of it!

That raises the question: How does God’s wrath translate to the morally upright condemned? The passage at which we are looking answers that question. Thus far we have seen these things:

- The BASIS for why God’s Wrath can rest upon the morally upright, Romans 2:1-2. In a word, it is because of hypocrisy. The Morally Upright are quick to judge others but slow to judge themselves!
- The CATALYST for their hypocrisy and so ultimately their condemnation, Romans 2:3-5a. They presume they are innocent. They assume God is well-pleased with them. They have a hard heart

² *The Holy Bible : English standard version*. 2001 (Ro 2:17–29). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

³ Compare Romans 1:19-32

⁴ Compare Romans 2:1-5

which loves sin and so does not respond to the warnings of Scripture.

Judicial Condemnation

Now, we are going to look at a third aspect of God's wrath and the morally upright: Their condemnation. Notice it takes two forms, the first is judicial.

Romans 2:1, "therefore you are without excuse."

The word for "without excuse" is a legal term and means, "without a reasoned defense." It implies more than simply not having anything reasonable to say. It is a statement describing a defendant's condemnation, they have no place to stand!

To appreciate this we must again recall the legal context of redemption and the fact that Scripture teaches that someday each and every one of us are going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ and answer for our deeds done in the body. At this time, the question will be, "In what are you boasting?" Recall, that this term "boasting" primarily deals with what a man hopes in or relies upon, specifically when it comes to approaching God. And thus, to understand the legal context of the Bible we begin with a simple question: On what basis will you stand before God?

Now in answering this question we are brought back to the royal protocol of ancient days as in the book of Esther when a man, woman, or child endeavored to approach a king. Recall that in such an event, a person could only approach a king with an invitation. If you saw a king walking past and you attempted to approach him without being summoned, you most likely would be killed. This was the concern of Esther!⁵ Truly, anyone who was granted the ear of the king had to stand before him on the right *BASIS*. Perhaps yours was the news of war. Or maybe you were royalty or an ambassador. Regardless, you had to have credentials to speak to a king.

Now the Bible pictures two approaches, one of which is acceptable to God. You can approach God on the basis of the merits of another. Paul outlines this:

Galatians 6:14, "But may it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

Paul knew that the only basis upon which he could stand before God was the work of Jesus Christ on the cross! And so, though at one time he was a great man in Judaism, nevertheless his boast was not in his religious accomplishments, but in Christ's work on the cross.

Philippians 3:7-9, "But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith."

⁵ Compare Esther 4:15-16

Accordingly, on the Last Day many will stand before God on the basis of the work of Christ. Because Christ fulfilled the law's demand on our behalf, we can boldly approach God.

Or, you can approach God on the basis of your own merit. This is what the Jews of Paul's day (the morally upright) did. Speaking of them, Paul wrote this:

Romans 10:2-3, "For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own [righteousness], they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God."

All that the Jews did as religious people was in the effort to prove that they were worthy of standing before God. Accordingly, they boasted in:

- Their religious devotion.
- Their religious possessions- they were entrusted with the word.
- Their religious heritage- they were children of Abraham!

And so on the Day of Judgment, an event which every Jew of Paul's day expected and anticipated, they knew that it would go well with them on account of all that they had done and possessed in Abraham!

But herein is the point of our passage! Because of their hypocrisy, arrogance, false hope, and hard heart, many of the morally upright of Paul's day would in fact stand before God and, like the Gentile whom they condemned, be without a defense! Or in the words of Paul, they'd be "without excuse," that is: speechless, mute, having nothing worthwhile to say.

You must see that this would have been a shocking statement to the ears of a Jew; the morally upright religious of Paul's day. They were the ones:

- Who observed the Law to the utmost.
- Whose message was the only hope for the world.
- Who were chosen by God to be a blessing to the nations.
- To whom God specially, intimately, and supernaturally spoke, guided, and directed.

They were also ones in the last day that would stand speechless before the judgment seat of God and receive a sentence of condemnation!

See, when the morally upright hold to a form of godliness and yet deny its power and rely upon their religion to save them from God's displeasure, they hold a position which is just as indefensible as the Gentile's! So, on the Last Day, the Jew will stand judicially condemned before God; they will be without an excuse!

And though before man they may posit argument after argument in the attempt to prove their innocence, the sentence will be swift and just: "Guilty!" Guilty of...

- Hypocrisy.
- Religiosity.

- Formalism.
- A False Boast!
- Sin!

That is the first element to the condemnation of the morally upright; they stand defenseless before God. Yet there is a second. Not only do they stand before God judicially condemned, they will also experience this condemnation punitively.

Punitively condemned.

Romans 1:5b, "but because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

The word for "wrath" refers to settled indignation. When used of God it refers to a holy revulsion of His being which culminates in a literal opposition. And so again "the wrath of God" says not only something about what God does, but also what He is in doing it! Thus, God's wrath carries a twofold idea: Punishment and displeasure.

- Punishment: in that God's wrath rewards sin with death (Romans 6:23) and the horrors which will follow.
- Displeasure: in that God is revolted by sin!

Now if this wasn't bad enough, notice the text says that these morally upright people are "storing up wrath." (Romans 1:5b) This is an interesting choice of words. To "store up"/treasure was a positive thing carrying the idea of "laying up as a treasure little by little." Accordingly see that this is a shocking statement, and Paul clearly knew it! See ,as those in a morally upright religion, the child of God has received the command to labor for that which is eternal.

1 Timothy 6:18-19, "Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future..."

Matthew 6:19-21, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven..."

And because of this command, he has the expectancy upon his death that as he has labored for the eternal on earth, he will receive the benefits of his labor in glory.

1 Corinthians 9:25, "And every who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable."

2 Timothy 4:8, "In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing."

Now all of this the Jews of Paul's day affirmed! In fact, when they heard the phrase "storing up" they

most likely would have thought of the rewards their labor on earth was procuring.⁶ And so notice, Paul is using the concept of “storing up rewards” here with a sobering twist. The morally upright who take refuge in their religion would indeed receive a reward at the end of time, but NOT the expected reward of...

- A “well done thou good and faithful servant.”
- The “treasure of a good foundation for the future.”
- An “imperishable and undefiled” treasure “that will not fade away.”

They are storing up the reward of God’s wrath! With this we conclude that the wrath that is being *REVEALED* against the Gentile during the present age is the very wrath that is being *SUSPENDED* in the case of the Jew/the morally upright. And the longer it is suspended, the more it accumulates until “the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.” (Romans 2:5) This is in reference to the Final Judgment. On that day, God’s anger will be *fully* released and His righteous judgment *fully* unveiled against the morally upright religious! Speaking of the apostate church, John wrote:

Revelation 18:4-6, “And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, ‘Come out of her, my people, that you may not participate in her sins and that you may not receive of her plagues; for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. Pay her back even as she has paid, and give back to her double according to her deeds, in the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her.’”⁷

And so, because of...

- Their failure to apply God’s word to their own lives.
- Their assumption that their religion of circumcision secured God’s approval.
- Their consequent unwillingness to turn from their self-effort and sin to the cross of Christ.

On the Last Day, many a morally upright individual will find themselves **JUDICIALLY & PUNITIVELY** Condemned. They will be without excuse and so receive the accumulated wrath of God upon their person for eternity!

That then brings us to a very important question: Is this text describing you? This again is an important question because the tendency for most of us, in light of a rather hard passage like this, is quickly to conclude that this is not speaking to us but to Jews- you know *those people way back then!* And since we aren’t Jews; *those people way back then*, we can agree with the doctrine of this text, all the while never allowing the truth of this text to force us to evaluate the basis upon which we stand before God!

Yet I remind you that by and large the church today houses what in Christ’s day would have been called...

- The Jew.
- The Person who boasts in God.
- The one who knows God’s will and approves the things that are essential.

⁶ Compare Matthew 6:19-21

⁷ Compare Revelation 20:11-15

And so rather than quickly sloughing the warning of this text off, it is imperative that we allow it to draw us in and reveal our heart's trust/devotion. And so, let us be ever mindful of the point of this text. You can...

- Be a member of an evangelical church all your life.
- You can serve as an officer.
- You can teach Sunday school.
- You can be a missionary and be used of God to bring many to Christ!
- Say yes to the call of the gospel.
- You can pray the sinner's prayer.

And yet, you still could receive the Judicial and punitive condemnation of God's wrath!

1 Corinthians 10 is a great example of this. In 1 Corinthians 9:27 Paul mentions the possibility of participating in the actual work of God's kingdom and then being disqualified. How could this happen? Paul explains his assertion in 1 Corinthians 10.

1 Corinthians 10:1a, "For..." [literally, "I say this because..."]

From this little word we see that Paul's discussion in 1 Corinthians 10: 1-12 is given as an explanation of his statement in 1 Corinthians 9:27 about a Christian being disqualified. Notice the credentials of those who are disqualified.

1 Corinthians 10:1b-4, "For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ."

There's not a child of God today that wouldn't long to boast of these things. The people of God in the Old Testament enjoyed privileges and a relationship with Christ that is the envy of most in the church today. And yet in spite of all that they had they nevertheless were disqualified.

1 Corinthians 10:5, 11, "5 Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness... 11 Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."

It is NOT what you have, do, or say that will matter when we stand before God on the Day of Judgment. Get this! Those in a morally Upright Religion can receive the Wrath of God, just like the Gentile! That is why Paul writes this:

1 Corinthians 10:12, "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."

Truly, you who think you stand because of your relationship to the body of Christ, baptism, religious devotion, beware... watch out... take heed... LEST YOU FALL! RATHER the focus of Scripture is the basis or the ground upon which you stand as you approach God! And so I ask the question, "On what basis do

you stand before God?"

Now, I don't want any leaving with any doubt here. And so, I want us all carefully to respond to three questions which I believe will reveal our trust. Finish the sentence, "God accepts me because _____?"

In a religion of Moral Hypocrisy, the answer to this is manifold. God accepts me because...

- I asked for His forgiveness.
- I went forward on an altar call.
- I let go and let God.
- In all that I do, I seek to praise Him!
- I accepted Christ as my personal Lord and Savior.

Mark it! None of the above is reason for why God accepts you! And if you find yourself convinced of one of these, it is either that you are uneducated or that you are among the Moral Hypocrisy that will be judged on the last day!

What is the one and only answer as to "why should God accept me"? The Cross! Again this is why Paul wrote this:

Galatians 6:14, "But may it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ..."

The ground of Paul's acceptance before God was the cross of Christ! How is it that this was this his boast?

Colossians 1:21-22, "And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach."

The Bible is quite clear; if we stand guilty before God this day of just one sin, we will perish. But that is why Christ died. He died as a sacrifice in our place. Speaking of Christ's work on the cross Isaiah prophesied this:

Isaiah 53:6, "All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him."

The BASIS upon which we are accepted, approved, saved, sanctified and glorified is THE WORK OF CHRIST ON THE CROSS! And to suppose anything else is to belittle the cross, and so potentially prove ourselves to be among the Moral Hypocrisy!

Do you find yourself living in light of yesterday's graces? In a religion of moral hypocrisy, what occurred yesterday is the strength through which the present is lived...

- I was confirmed.

- I was baptized.
- I memorized the book of James.
- I said “Yes” to Jesus.
- I have had great devotions in the past.

Amazingly this is where many in the church live! They’re like a bunch of washed-up athletes living in light of past glory. Yet you must see that the danger here is that when we look for assurance for salvation in the labor of our hands, it is possible to place ones sole trust in these labors.

If you find yourself living in the glow of yesterday’s victory, again you either are uneducated or you are among the Moral Hypocrisy! Indeed, how does the child of God live? In light of the Second Coming of Christ! We have been born again:

1 Peter 1:13, "...to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

Because we know we are at peace with God, our anticipation is the day when the Lord returns! We can’t wait to see God and thank Him for His cross work! Accordingly we don’t look behind us, we look ahead! And so speaking of the Second Coming and the life we will receive, Peter wrote this:

1 Peter 1:6, "In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials."

Trials are dwarfed by the prospect of eternity! Accordingly, our glory, delight, joy, and pride is NOT what we have done, BUT in what Christ has and will do! That is why Paul wrote this so emphatically:

Philippians 3:13-14, "...but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

The child of God does not live and move with a backward look about him! Rather he forgets the past; good or bad, and lives each day with a renewed faith and hope in the Lord Jesus Christ and His coming! God calls us to present our bodies a living and holy sacrifice. How then do we approach God? As a blemished sacrifice struggling with sin OR as an unblemished sacrifice conquering sin?

Those in a religion of moral hypocrisy approach God as an unblemished sacrifice conquering sin! They say this:

Luke 18:11-12, "...God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers... I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get."

Luke 15:2, "And both the Pharisees and scribes began to grumble, saying, ‘This man receives sinners and eats with them.’"

The implication here is that they were the unblemished ones that God accepted! How is it that Jesus therefore would choose to eat with sinners? But the genuine child of God, knowing that the BASIS of his acceptance is the cross, approaches God BECAUSE he is a blemished sacrifice struggling with sin! Christ said,

Luke 5:31-32, "...It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

Thus the one Christ accepts is the one who beats his chest and cries:

Luke 18:13, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!"

And thus we read of Paul:

Romans 7:23-24, "...I see a different law in the members of my body waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?"

I hope these three questions have revealed something of your thinking and living as a participant in a morally upright religion. Those who will receive God's wrath are the ones who live TO please God! But those who are accepted in the sight of God and live as genuine children of God are those who live BECAUSE they please God through the cross! And that is why the summary of it all is the basis upon which this entire section in Romans was written.

Romans 1:17b, "Those who live are the ones who are righteous through faith."

If this is your glory, hope, and crown, then rejoice with me this day! It is well with your soul! If it has been revealed that you are a religious hypocrite, then confess your sin and trust in the work of Christ on the cross!

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Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

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