

You Too Are Guilty, Oh Moral Man!

A Study on Romans 2:1-5

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In Romans 1:18–3:20, Paul shows us that all men are guilty before a holy God because all are sinners. The fact of one's sinfulness leads to the inevitable result of God's judgment on him for all eternity, unless he receives God's only answer to the sin problem: Christ's death on the cross for sin. Men are lost without Christ.

Your best resolutions
 must wholly be waived,
Your highest ambitions
 be crossed.
You need never think you
 are going to be saved,
Until you have learned
 you are lost.

Picture a courtroom scene: God is the judge, the Apostle Paul is the prosecutor, and each individual is a defendant. As Paul brings men before the bar of justice, each is pronounced a sinner before God, guilty and deserving punishment. When each person pleads his good works, the judgment is "Guilty!"

In Romans 1:18-32, Paul brought the Gentiles before God and proved them sinners because they had been given light and had rejected that light because they were sinners by nature. These pagan Gentiles turned to religion, idolatry, and immorality, and became guilty of the most hideous sins.

In Romans 2:1-16, Paul brings the moral man before a holy God to show that he is also guilty and stands in line for God's judgment. In context, this section seems to apply to the moral Jew who was liberal in his theology and religion (although the Jew is not mentioned until verse 17), but Paul seems to take it beyond the moral Jew and to apply it to all moral people everywhere. There were some among the Gentiles, and many among the Jews, to whom the descriptions of sins in chapter 1 did not fully apply because these people had not given themselves over to idolatry and hideous vice. So in this section, Paul proceeds to show the moral or ethical man that he too is a sinner. These are the "do-gooders" and Paul shows that even they are sinners, not because of unrighteousness, but because of self-righteousness! Paul shakes them from this self-righteousness by showing that judgment is their just desert unless they repent. He does not feed the ego of the do-gooder, but drives home judgment.

THE CHARGE — Romans 2:1

“Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man.” Paul says that the moral or ethical man is without excuse, and warns that judgment will come upon the cultured, refined, and civilized sinner, whether Jew or Gentile. The moral man is simply a refined sinner or a respectable sinner.

“Whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself.” This tells us why the moral man is without excuse. He passes judgment on the horrible acts of sin committed by others, and thinks himself so much better than they. He is guilty of pride! He condemns himself as he looks down his nose at people who do gross sins. He may think himself superior in race, civilization and culture, wealth, education, or ethics in general. Any person who has consciously or unconsciously judged and condemned an immoral person has proven himself a sinner under God’s wrath. If the moral man can judge those beneath him by his moral standards, then God, who is above him, can certainly judge him by His standards.

Fear of judgment is the most potent teaching to bring a self-righteous person to Christ. There are two basic reasons men turn to Christ: 1) they have a sense of need; 2) they have a fear of judgment.

I once heard a dear Christian lady give her testimony. She said that as an unsaved person she had possessed no outward vices. She had been happy. She had felt that she had purpose in life. She had had good mental and physical health, and a good husband. She had liked the life she lived and had seen no real need for Christ. One time she had heard a preacher speak on hell, and she had laughed to think that any man could hold such a ridiculous belief. She thought that all men were basically good, and that a loving God would not judge anyone, least of all her. But later, in the quietness of her room, she could not throw out the possibility that she might be judged and cast into hell. The thought haunted her day and night. It was out of the fear of facing eternal judgment, and that alone, that she turned to Jesus Christ for salvation. Of course, now that she has received Christ, she sees how wrong she really was as an unsaved person. She praises the Lord for preachers who preach on the realities of judgment and hell because it shakes up those who are complacent and self-righteous.

Men tend to judge their lives by the lives of other people. When they do, most see themselves as better than others. However, when we compare our lives to a holy God, there is no question that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” When we are walking down a street among other people, we can see who is tall and who is short, and we can make all kinds of comparisons. If we look down on these same people from the top of

a tall building, however, they all appear to be the same height. When God views us, even though we all sin to different degrees, he sees us all as sinners — we all fall short.

“For thou that judgest doest the same things.” A moral person must be condemned because he practices to some degree the sins of the heathen Gentiles. The sin may be only in thought, but it is there nevertheless.

“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire” (Matt. 5:21,22).

“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matt. 5:27,28).

The sin may also be actually practiced, but covered with a cloak of education, social prestige, culture, etc. Sin is relative for the moral man — it is what he makes it.

A construction worker walked into a fried chicken restaurant and ordered two chicken dinners to take out. Instead of a sack with his order, the clerk accidentally handed him a sack containing the day’s receipts, \$825. When the man and a lady friend arrived at Newport Beach to enjoy their picnic dinners, he discovered the money. He promptly drove back to the restaurant to return it. When the restaurant manager started to report to the police that the money had been returned, the construction worker said, “Please don’t use my name. This lady is not my wife.”

THE FIRST PRINCIPLE OF JUDGMENT — Romans 2:2-4

Paul lists seven basic principles God uses in judging the moral man: 1) truth (2:2); 2) goodness (2:4); 3) accumulated guilt (2:5); 4) works (2:6); 5) impartiality (2:11); performance (2:13); and 7) God’s omniscience (2:16).

“But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things.” Paul acknowledges that men are sure of God’s judgment upon the evil acts of the heathen. The moral man is sure that unrighteousness should be punished, but he does not see himself as unrighteous because he is comparing himself to other men. The moral man is confident that he will escape God’s judgment because he is a good person. He rarely

thinks of himself as guilty, but knows others should be judged. When stopped by a policeman a fellow said, “Officer, what are you bothering me for? Why don’t you go out and catch some of those teenage speedsters and leave us law abiding citizens alone!” We expect God to punish others who need it, but not us.

The judgment of God will be according to truth. It will be fair, according to the reality of the facts of the case. It will be according to God’s holy nature and character. He will consider the facts and will not be prejudiced. The person who says in self-righteousness, “I just cast my life into the hands of a just God who knows I have done the best I can,” is deluded. God’s truth penetrates right through man’s sham and hypocrisy!

God is a realist. Psychologists say that we all have a mental image of ourselves, and that we usually think ourselves to be quite nice people. But God sees us as we really are.

“And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?” Man puts up a defense mechanism and rationalizes the judgment of God. He can actually do or think the very things for which he condemns others, but still think that somehow he will escape the judgment of God. He feels himself to be so much better than others. The reasoning of the moral man is but human speculation. God tells us that the good man will be judged. He shall not escape God’s judgment. If he has judged someone else even once, criticized even one time, ever thought an evil thought, or practiced any kind of sin — stretching the truth, losing his temper, gossiping, etc. — he falls into the category of “sinner” and stands under God’s wrath. There is no escape from this judgment; it is inevitable; it is certain. One who continues in the sin of self-righteousness cannot escape this judgment!

THE SECOND PRINCIPLE OF JUDGMENT — Romans 2:4

“Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering?” The moral man shows his contempt for God by despising God’s goodness. He may or may not give intellectual assent to God, but he takes all the credit for everything good that happens. God deals with all men as His creatures in common grace — He provides home, children, daily food, prosperity, friends, health, etc. With the very breath that God gives him, the moral man prides himself on his efforts and accomplishments.

The moral man despises God’s forbearance. God delays His punishment so men may repent and turn to Him, and the moral man mocks this. He thinks there will be no judgment. But the moral man shall not have the last word; there is no escape from God’s judgment. The moral man despises the longsuffering of God who is patiently holding back His judgment so that man might turn to Christ, but man only laughs at the concept that God is a God of wrath.

“Not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” The good acts of God are designed to bring the moral man to repentance, but man is willfully ignorant of this, living only for himself and his morality. To repent means to change one’s mind. God is waiting for men to change their minds about Jesus Christ, lest they have to face His inevitable wrath. Rejection of God’s goodness is enough to bring the wrath of God upon men, and if men do this, God will judge them by that same goodness.

THE THIRD PRINCIPLE OF JUDGMENT — Romans 2:5

“But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath.” Because he is constantly despising God’s goodness, the moral man is storing up guilt which will be credited to his account at the judgment day. He does not want to know the truth — he hardens his heart to the fact that he is a sinner. He goes on living in a dream world of fantasy about his own condition and his responsibility to God. Hardening of the arteries may take one to an early grave, but hardening of the heart against God will take one to the lake of fire!

“Against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.” Judgment is coming for all men, moral and immoral. It will be a righteous judgment, according to truth. There is no escape!

CONCLUSION

God will judge all men, moral and immoral, self-righteous and unrighteous, good and bad:

“Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead” (Acts 17:31).

“And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee” (Acts 24:25).

The thought of judgement should chill one’s blood.

The truth of the Scriptures is that no man need stay condemned and no man need fear death or judgment. God has made a provision in the death of Christ whereby He can be just

and judge sin and sinners, and yet forgive sinners if they trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior:

“For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:17-19).

The moral man must realize that God does not and will not save those who think themselves to be good. He saves only those who acknowledge that they are sinners: “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32).

The prophet Ezekiel, when pleading with Israel to repent lest they fall into judgment, said:

“Say unto them, As I live saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?” (Ezek. 33:11).

Your answer must be that you die because you have refused to accept God’s one solution to your sin problem. God’s answer is Jesus Christ.