

Study in Romans

Doctrine > Bad News > Eternal Wrath
Introduction to Hypocrisy
Romans 2:1-29

Jesus and the Apostles on the Issue of Hypocrisy

As we approach Paul's exposé in chapter 2 of the hypocrisy of the moralist, it is worth understanding the large amount of material in the New Testament—indeed the whole Bible—about this issue of an outward religious show versus the inward reality of genuine love for God and other people. In the New Testament, the hypocritical moralists largely fall into two groups: Pharisees and Judaizers.

Jesus was especially hard on the moralists of His day—largely composed of the Pharisees—and was eventually killed by them for it, because He had exposed them to the light to show that their deeds were in fact rooted in hearts filled with evil motives. This group of moralists thought that pleasing God was automatic for those descended from Abraham and who were keeping their traditions based on the mosaic law.

The Judaizers were Jewish Christians who taught that all Christians—especially those from a Gentile background—had to keep the requirements of the mosaic law in addition to faith in Jesus in order to be saved. Paul is the most vocal Apostle opposing this teaching, opposing even the Apostle Peter to his face in public when he began to display hypocrisy with the Judaizers around (Gal. 2:11-14).

Jesus

Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7)

Throughout this sermon, Jesus radically challenged the prevailing teaching of the religious leaders that focused heavily on an outward show to be seen and praised by people. By contrast, Jesus spoke of the inward, unseen attitude of the heart that pleases God the Father (6:2-4). His emphasis for His followers was on changing their character to be like their Father (5:48), not nit-picking over finer and finer interpretations of keeping the mosaic law. Examples:

- The disciple's life is illustrated as light. Light is used as a metaphor of truth. Therefore, the life of the disciple is to be genuine, bringing glory to God by reflecting His character. (5:13-16)
- In matters of civil justice, murder, adultery, divorce, oath taking, and vengeance: These have little to do with the outward and everything to do with the attitude of the heart. (5:21-42)
- In matters of charity, love for enemies, giving to the needy, prayer, fasting, and tithing: Again the focus is on the heart and the intentions seen only by God the Father. (5:43-6:24)
- In matters of personal character, worry about provisions, judging others and persistence in seeking God's blessing: The disciple is to trust God's promises for provision and for justice. He or she is to worry about their own standing before Him, realizing that only His evaluation of them matters when all is said and done. Instead, we are please God by treating others as we ourselves want to be treated. (6:25-7:12)
- The final Judgement of God will see only a small few who entered through the narrow gate of faith in Jesus, who didn't just hear His words, but took them to heart to seek after God's way of righteousness above all other pursuits. Jesus ends this famous sermon with the most sobering warning to the moralist on all the New Testament: Many people will stand before Him thinking they were His followers, only to find out when it is too late that they were deceived, being in fact "evil doers," despite a long show of adherence to Jesus!! (7:13-27)

Matthew 23:1-39 (whole chapter)

- They tie up heavy burdens for others, but are not willing to even lift a finger to help. (v. 4)
- They love recognition from men. (vv. 5-7)
- They shut the Kingdom of God in men's faces, not entering themselves and getting in the way of others who are trying to enter. (v. 13)
- They think they are making converts to God, but in reality they are converts to Satan. (v. 15)
- They are so myopic in keeping the law of God, that they miss the whole point. (vv. 16-24, esp. 24)
- They are focused on the outside, but it's what's on the inside that counts. Two illustrations: the cup and tomb. (vv. 25-28)
- They consider themselves to be better than prior generations not realizing they are just like them, in fact even worse because they will reject the Messiah Himself and His church. (vv. 29-36)

Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18:9-14)

- The opening verse (v. 9) tells us the parable is directed at those who were satisfied with their own righteousness and were critical of others who didn't meet their standards.
- The Pharisee prays to himself, thanking God he is better than others.
- The Publican acknowledges his sin before God and begs for mercy.
- Jesus says that only the Publican went home justified before God. All those who are proud will be humbled by God, and those humble themselves will be exalted by God.

Paul

Epistle to the Galatians

- Paul's main concern in this book is to counteract the false teaching of the Judaizers who were trying to, "bring us into slavery," (2:4b).
- Paul takes this confrontation of man-centered righteousness ("righteousness of their own" in Rom. 10:3) so seriously, that he is willing to confront the Apostle Peter in public when he starts lapsing back into this sin of hypocrisy (2:11-14).
- One of the strongest statements in the NT against hypocritical moralism is made in 3:1-3. Paul calls them "foolish" for falling prey again to the flesh and its desires for its own glory rather than the glory of God. We start this road of salvation by faith, what makes us think we'll complete it some other way?
- The purpose of the law was to manage God's people—much as a guardian manages a young child—until the time was right for Jesus to come in the flesh and provide the way of God's righteousness to be applied to all who have faith in Him (ch. 3-4).
- It is for freedom that Christ has set us free! (5:1) But if we walk back into our prison cell, even after being rescued out from it and brought into the glorious light of day, then Christ and all He did is of no value to us (5:2-6). The only thing that counts in this life now (i.e., the Christian life), is "faith working through love," (v. 6b).
- Are we then to just walk away from God's moral will altogether? No, instead by walking in the Spirit, we will please God in a way that walking by the law in the flesh never can. Paul contrasts the fruit of the flesh with that of the Spirit (5:13-25).
- If we're still not convinced Paul is serious about his main point in this letter, Paul cannot help but write in his own hand (6:11) the warning again in 6:12-16!!

Colossians 2:6-23

- Verses 6-7 have the same basic message of Galatians 3:3: The way you received salvation (faith) is the same way you will receive its completed work.
- Paul brings up the same point again that circumcision is nothing. Christ's work to redeem His people is everything. He canceled the record of debt that stood against us and nailed it to His cross, paying the debt we never could. Because we are justified in Christ, we are no longer afraid of man-centered opinions of our worthiness. The punch line comes in v. 23: They have no value for restraining sin!

Three Pitfalls of Moralistic Hypocrisy

In all these passages and many more that we didn't cover, one theme emerges over and over: The fear of man has replaced the fear of the Lord. Proverbs 29:25 warns about the trap of the fear of man. This prison is placing too much value on the opinions of fallible people to whom we will not give an account on Judgement Day anyway. Having studied this topic and been around various forms of legalistic moralistic hypocrisy throughout my life, three pitfalls stand out to me that, if known, detected and avoided, will go a long way in freeing us from hypocrisy.

*The fear of man lays a
snare, but whoever trusts in
the LORD is safe.*
- Proverbs 29:25 ESV

1. Personal preferences
 - a. Definition: Placing undue value on the opinions of people—myself included—about my behavior.
 - b. This is huge! This one is the root of so much hypocrisy. The other two grow out of it.
 - c. Don't mistake your personal preferences, or those of another person or persons, for the conscience-binding authority of the Word of God!
 - d. God doesn't play favorites. Because you highly respect someone as a minister does not mean God places more value on them and their opinions than on other people.
2. Superstition
 - a. Definition: Attributing to morally neutral objects, people, animals, or ideas, undue spiritual authority or power.
 - b. Examples: Satanic beats in certain music styles. God's or Satan's blessing of certain Bible translations.
3. Mysticism
 - a. Definition: Placing undue value on the experiences of spiritual encounters, real or imagined.
 - b. Examples: A special "feeling" in a church meeting, Bible study, etc. Having a dream in which God or an angel speaks to you in some way.