

# Being Religious and Lost, Rom.2:1-16

Pax Romana #3

◆**Intro:** There was a middle aged man who had become concerned that his wife was losing her hearing. He was tired of repeating himself all the time and so he decided to prove to her that she needed help. That evening when he walked in the door after work he began to put her to the test. Seeing that she stood at the sink, with her back to him, he remained by the front door and asked in a normal voice, "Say, honey, when is dinner?" No answer. She had failed test one. He moved down to the end of the hall and repeated the question in the same level. No answer. Yep, poor gal was losing her hearing alright. He walked halfway across the kitchen for test 3 and repeated his question about dinner. No answer whatsoever. A third failing grade. Finally he walked up right behind her. He was so close he could now see she was peeling carrots in the sink. He spoke test number 4 into her left ear, "Say, honeypot, when is dinner?" She turned and said, "For the fourth time, in about 10 minutes!"

◆They say when you point a finger at someone else you have three pointing back at you! That's kind of what's going on in Roman's chapter two. In chapter 1 Paul rejoiced in the Gospel message of a "righteousness from God", the *gift* of forgiveness given to the world through Jesus Christ. As we saw last week, he pointed at the fallenness of the unbelieving world, and it's depravity, as indicative of our tremendous need for a "righteousness" from somewhere else, besides man! He pointed to the blindness and the suppression of God's truth,

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although all men should be able to see God in 1) creation and the 2) moral order all around us. And then we come to chapter 2. Suddenly Paul is no longer talking about “them”, the unbelieving world, but about “you”; the people of the Christian church reading his letter! Undoubtedly his readers in Rome included converted Jewish people as well as gentile believers. It’s as though Paul is saying to the church people, “Don’t get all high and mighty now, pointing fingers at the deafness of the world, when you ought to know that you don’t hear so well yourself.” In a nut shell, Paul is telling us that the ground is level at the cross. Everyone of us is a beggar in need of grace, that ought to have an impact on us. Lets think it over. First off, **◆1. Moral people also need a savior.** Surprising isn’t it. We might have nodded our heads reading through the mixed-up sins of depraved people in chapter 1. The brothel owners, the sex-traffickers, the pushers, the murderous gangs picking people off in drive-bys, the lustful, the greedy. Roman society in Paul’s day was as immoral as human culture has ever been. The city of Pompeii has been called a perfect example of a Pax Romans city. It was buried instantly in 20’ of volcanic ash in 79AD, about 20 years after Paul wrote his letter to the Roman Christians. 1500 years later it was rediscovered and today you can walk through the well-preserved city and see a day in the life of ancient Rome, stopped literally in it’s tracks. What is perhaps most surprising is the magnitude of the sex industry that was

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clearly going on. Walls are still adorned with pornographic artwork in as explicit detail as can be found on the internet today.

◆ Now maybe nobody in the room today used to be a pole-dancer, or a thug, or pimp, or in the drug cartel. I don't know. I'm guessing that at least a few of us grew up in tamer circumstances. So it just might be that our tendency would be similar to that of the Jewish Christians Paul writes to. In comparison we feel like we are really not that bad off, while *those people*, well.

◆ A. Danger: Moralists tend to "pass judgment" on immoral people. This is clearly Paul's topic. The term "judgment" is repeated in various forms seven times in the first five verses! What exactly does "pass judgment" mean. To pass judgment is not the same as to "make a judgment". We are called to do this constantly, hour by hour. Shall I take his bike? No, that's wrong. I hurt her feelings, I should apologize because that's right. Shall we allow murder in our town? No. Shall we allow churches to help the poor? Is it right to let my dog do his business on my neighbor's yard? These are judgments. But to "pass judgment" here is to point out wrong with the accompanying attitude that says, "You are low, lost, and I'm glad to see it because it makes me feel better about myself not being as low and lost as you." We call that judgmentalism. And that's what Paul is cautioning against.

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◆ B. Know what's interesting. Paul points out that being judgmental is the opposite of God who does not "show favoritism". Know what favoritism is? You talk to the pretty girl in the lunch line, but not to the larger one, or the small, fearful one. You serve the handsome man's table and you're as nice as pie. That hacking, baggy-eyed fellow barely gets a grunt and his water refilled. You don't have time for her 'cuz she dresses unfashionably. This is all "favorite"-ism. Paul mentions this in verse 11 as something God does not do. Here's the interesting thing. James writes about the same thing: moralists who look down on others who are "badder" than them, and he calls it favoritism too! Listen.

◆ *If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbour as yourself," you are doing right. But if you show favouritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as law-breakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a law-breaker. Jms 2:8-11*

◆ What's he mean? Don't be patting yourself on the back as a good sinner, while judging another person as a bad sinner. All persons who have sinned are in the same boat. But moralists are "favoring" themselves and being therefore "judgmental" of others. This is very dangerous for spiritual health. We tend to be far quicker and harsher in our

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criticism of others than of ourselves. We find all kinds of excuses for our sin. We didn't do our job, but then

◆ "so-and-so didn't do his part either", or

◆ we "were tired", or

◆ "I assumed it didn't matter because you never...",

◆ or "everyone else was doing such and such", or

◆ "they don't pay me enough to be that comprehensive."

Ever said any of these? Its very easy not to be fair about yourself, and it's dangerous.

- ◆ C. Judgmentalism is a child of pride. Pride is making an idol out of yourself and it makes it very difficult to love God or be grateful for the Gospel. This is exactly the same situation as in the Parable of the two Sons we studied last September. The elder son looked down on the sinful, straying younger son who drank it up, shot it up, spent it, lost it, and got who knows what kind of diseases in his riotous living –while he(elder) never left and slaved for Dad daily. You may recall that Jesus points out that the older brother was just as lost as the younger. He was just as alienated from Dad as the younger brother, though he stayed home and kept the rules. A lot of church people are like this, in Rome, and in Lafayette. Their idol is their goodness. "I behave. I'm not an addict, an alcoholic, or a fornicator. I don't curse like a sailor, or dress like a hussie. I might be a workaholic but

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that's an acceptable sin in my book. I might watch all that stuff on TV, but I don't DO it." Isn't that exactly what James was talking about? And Paul?

◆ *For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. Jms2:10*

Why is that a problem?

- ◆ **2. Because judgment is coming and my judgmentalism may very well reveal that I are not living by faith in the Gospel at all.** Oh, preacher, why do you have to talk about judgment again, it's such a downer? Well for one, it's in the text (v5, 16) Secondly, judgment day is not really downer. It's a good thing! It means a cure has been found. It means hope has a reason. It means there is something that is best and right, and life-giving. Inspecting your car before going on a long trip is a precaution. Even so, God is being gracious to let us know that there will be an inspection, and every flawed part or heart will be disqualified for the trip into eternity. Without judgement, salvation has no meaning. Without sickness, we have no interest in a doctor.
- ◆ A. The cross of Jesus is glorious truth because judgment is coming! The mercy of God is good news *because* justice is coming!
  - ◆ Review verses 5-11...

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- ◆ Now at first glance it might seem to you that Paul has a double standard, right. In chapter one he told us salvation was a “righteousness from God.” People don’t, can’t achieve it. Now it looks like he’s saying, “If you achieve it, hey everything’s cool. If not, bumme-city for you.” You want peace? Do the right thing. People who do right things (righteousness) come out on top in the end. Is that what Paul is saying? Yes it is! That’s the non-favoritism of God! His perfect justice and fairness. That means that *if* I do all the right things I won’t get punishment.
- ◆ B. But, while God’s fairness means the world is built on a standard of perfection, that doesn’t mean a human can do it! This is Paul’s point. The Jews were thinking, “Hey, we know the truth. We have the Law, the scriptures. We’re in the club. We’re good to go.” No you’re not. You have to keep the scriptures every one, and you don’t! The Gentiles have the laws too, they are written in the human heart.
  - ◆“(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.)” Romans 2:14, 15, NIV.
- ◆ In other words, the church-going sinners in Rome were in the same boat as the brothel patrons. Everybody “has” the

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law. It's not recognizing what is right or for that matter even preaching it that insures peace and life. It's doing what is right, the laws. And not some but all of them! Ie. Jew, gentiles, nice sinners who are all about themselves, and notorious sinners who shoot everyone around them, child-pornographers and moral child-prodigies all stand on the same floor.

- ◆ C. Maybe I can draw a comparison to help us feel the weight of this truth. Some years ago there was a movie called Crocodile Dundee about a bushman/cowboy/gator-hunter from Australia. Dundee comes to visit New York and gets stopped on the street by a punk with a switchblade. He is unfazed, and replies, "That's not a knife. This is a knife!" and pulls out a bowie knife that I swear was more like a small sword. With a swish in the air he splits the punks jacket open without touching his skin. The kid runs off. No Competition.
- ◆ Ok picture this. In the film Jurassic Park, velociraptors are stalking the children in the Park headquarters about to lung on them, when out of nowhere a T-Rex swoops one up in its jaws. He make quick work of them while the people run for cover. No competition.
  - ◆ We are, all of us, armed with pocket knives in a battle with long range missiles. We are all of us velociraptors pitted against T-Rex. We are all freshman gym class at the



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Olympics. We are all paper airplane folders trying to impress NASA. There is no competition when it comes to the purity of heaven. Jew, gentile, moral church-attender, mechanic who plasters his garage with porn –we are all desperately in need of a “righteousness from God” gift! This is sooo easy to forget once we were saved, and believe in the gospel of Jesus. Oh the depth and riches of the mercy of God in the righteousness given us in Jesus!

- ◆ **3.** One last thing: How should you and I be in light of all this? Obviously our own daily repentance before God. And after that? Well, what is the opposite of being judgmental? Here it is: **Do not make light of God’s mercy; rather be like God in his mercy.**

◆ “Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness leads you towards repentance?” Romans 2:4, NIV.

- ◆ Notice God’s kindness. Imitate God’s tolerance. Copy God’s patience! Not the way our culture does, pretending that everything is as legit as anything else, but the way God does, with a view toward leading folks toward repentance! Remember that text from James we read earlier about not having favorites and how any sin puts us in the category of “no competition”? Well here’s what he say next.

◆ *Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to*

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*anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!*

*James 2:12-13*

- ◆ Our own mercy is our proof of God's at work with us. Christians are people of mercy in the world. People who do not point fingers in disdain, but open arms in understanding. Be people who are slow to condemn and quick to consider the burdens of others behind their actions and long to help those heal, and people who don't get merely stuck on surface sins or appearances. When we observe people far from God we should be telling ourselves, "My heart is by nature just like theirs; it just shows itself differently." Otherwise we are making light of God's mercy to us! This is a tall order. It is our order.
- ◆ **Conclusion:** A man dies and goes to heaven. Of course, St. Peter meets him at the Pearly Gates and says, "Here's how it works. You need 100 points to make it into heaven. You tell me all the good things you've done, and I give you a certain number of points for each item, depending on how good it was. When you reach 100 points, you get in."
  - ◆ "Okay," the man says, "I was married to the same woman for 50 years and never cheated on her, even in my heart."
  - ◆ "That's wonderful," says St. Peter, "that's worth three points!"
  - ◆ "Three points?" he says. "Well, I attended church all my life and supported its ministry with my tithe and service."
  - ◆ "Terrific!" says St. Peter. "That's certainly worth a point."

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- ◆ "One point!?!!" "I started a soup kitchen in my city and worked in a shelter for homeless veterans."
- ◆ "Fantastic, that's good for two more points," he says
- ◆ "Two points!?!!" "Exasperated, the man cries. "At this rate the only way I'll get into heaven is by the grace of Jesus."
- ◆ "Bingo, 100 points! Come on in!"
- ◆ Ask "what makes me feel good about myself?" That's what you are relying on. That's your idol. (behaving, accomplishing, doing good work or a lot of it, other's peoples applause, fame as a rebel, reputation, money, being known as a good golfer) "When we rely on anything or anyone but Jesus to give us righteousness, we are refusing to accept the gospel." -Keller, p.43