

God's Kindness and Wrath

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Date: 17 October 2010

Preacher: Rev. Jim Salladin

[0 : 00] Amen. Let's pray together. Father, as we come now to your word, we ask that your Holy Spirit would be very active in our hearts, that you would open our ears, that you would open our hearts, that this wouldn't just be a kind of theoretical exercise, that this certainly wouldn't just be a kind of religious rite that we go through each week, that you would speak.

So, Lord, open our ears that we may hear you speak. In Jesus' name, amen. Go ahead and have a seat. And as Chris encouraged you, please grab your fancy Bibles.

What? Fancy? But anyways, the very exciting new black Bibles. Open them, please, to page 940. And we're looking at Romans chapter 2. Now, here's the thing, everybody. Anyway, tonight we have a pretty heavy passage.

Chris just read it. It's pretty heavy. It's pretty, you know, kind of in your face. And so we're just going to jump in. Okay, so kind of get ready for that.

[1 : 31] But tonight we need to talk about hypocrisy. Now, let me tell you why we're going to focus in on hypocrisy.

We're continuing in our series in the book of Romans. And if you were here last week, you know that we finished up last week Romans chapter 1.

And at the end of Romans chapter 1, the Apostle Paul, who's the writer of this epistle, of this book to the Romans, the Apostle Paul paints this kind of epic picture for us of evil.

Right? Do you remember that last week Aaron was preaching? And he paints just this epic picture of evil and how evil has impacted our world.

He talks a bit about kind of where evil comes from, where it comes from within the human heart. And he talks about how God, in his absolute goodness, is completely hostile to evil in the world.

[2 : 44] And that's where it ends up at the end of Romans chapter 1. But there's a bit of a problem at the end of Romans chapter 1. And here's the problem.

If you just stop at the end of Romans chapter 1, and if you don't go on to Romans chapter 2, it's almost like his analysis of evil is too easy.

Let me tell you what I mean by that. It is an easy thing for us to criticize and critique and complain about evil in the world as long as when we talk about evil, we're always talking about something out there.

Do you know what I mean by that? When you talk about evil, think about when you complain about, I don't know, a corrupt government or some sort of social system that is corrupted or something like that.

It's easy. It's almost recreational. You know what I mean? To complain about evil, something that's bad in the world, as long as you're talking about something outside yourself.

[4 : 05] But it all gets a little tougher. It all gets more difficult when you begin to recognize the evil that is in your own heart.

If you notice, it's easier to critique somebody else than it is to critique yourself. It's easy to talk about evil in general, but it hurts when it gets personal.

Okay, in Romans chapter 1, Paul talks about evil in the world at a kind of massive scale. But in Romans chapter 2, he gets personal.

He gets personal with us. And what happens is right here in our text, the Apostle Paul turns his gaze right at people like you and I.

He's looking particularly at religious, respectable, generally moral people, people like most of us.

[5 : 09] And he looks us right in the eye and he says, if you think for a moment that you're off the hook when it comes to evil in the world, you have completely missed the boat.

In this passage, Paul looks at people like us, generally religious, generally respectable, generally moral people, and he looks at us and he says, you guys, it's easy to talk about evil out there, but let's talk about it in your own heart because there is a particular type of evil.

There is a particular breed of evil that loves to thrive in the hearts of religious people. It's like it's natural habitat.

And the particular breed of evil that loves to squirm in and live inside religious hearts like you and me, that particular kind of evil is called hypocrisy.

So that's why we need to talk about hypocrisy tonight. And what I want to do is ask the question, what is the difference?

[6 : 16] How do you tell the difference between hypocritical religion on the one hand and authentic repentance on the other? So those are the two things we're going to look at.

We're going to look at the difference between them. Let's start with hypocritical religion. I want to show you three things about hypocritical religion from this passage. I want to talk about the root of hypocritical religion, the fruit of hypocritical religion, and the harvest of hypocritical religion.

The root, the fruit, the harvest. First of all, the root. The root of hypocritical religion is presumption. Look at verses 3 and 4. Do you suppose, O man, notice how he's getting personal right away. Do you suppose, O man, you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourselves, do you suppose that you will escape the judgment of God? And then verse 4 is the key thing.

Or do you presume on the riches of God's kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? Now, look at verse 4.

[7 : 32] Verse 4 makes me nervous. Let me tell you why it makes me nervous. As Christians, we talk a lot about God's love and God's grace and God's kindness, right?

I hope we do. I mean, we should. We better, okay? The centerpiece of the gospel, the central message of Christianity, is all about God's grace and his kindness and his mercy shown to us in Jesus Christ.

That's the main theme of the book of Romans. But there's a danger for you and I when we talk about God's kindness and his mercy.

And the danger is that we would begin to presume upon God's kindness. What do I mean by presuming upon God's kindness?

I mean that you can use God's kindness as an excuse to keep on sinning. Think with me about how it works.

[8 : 41] What happens is you hear about God's kindness and we can use God's kindness to reassure ourselves, kind of make us feel better, that the faults in our life and the sins in our life and the little inconsistencies in our life, we begin to think, you know, they're not that big of a deal.

I mean, not that big of a deal. Because God's a good guy, you know? He's just a good guy. And he understands.

I mean, God knows I'm human. Um, yeah, not that big of a deal, you know? And you just begin to justify yourself on the basis of God's kindness.

And the funny thing is, it looks and it sounds almost pious. It puts this face of religion upon you. It puts this mask of the gospel upon you.

You use all the right words. All the words of the gospel are all kind of fitted in there. It almost sounds orthodox. But what it does is it causes God to be totally irrelevant from your day-to-day life.

[9 : 56] And it's one of the main strategies for religious people to keep God at arm's length. We want to keep God at arm's length.

And what we do is we use his kindness as an excuse to keep him away from us. Now, can you see how that's the root of hypocrisy? Because what happens is you have a religious face on, but you have a license to live any way you want.

Okay, the root of hypocrisy is presumption, presuming upon God's kindness. The fruit of hypocritical religion is self-righteousness.

Look at verse 1. Therefore you, again, he's personal, 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.

Now, think with me a little bit about hypocrisy. The thing a hypocrite wants, more than anything else, is to be free from God.

[11 : 12] That's what a hypocrite wants. A hypocrite wants to live independently from God. But they want to do it in a kind of respectable way, and so they want to do it in a religious way.

The first thing they do is they presume upon God's kindness. They think, you know, God will never correct me. He will only ever affirm me. But very soon after that, a next step is taken.

Almost inevitably, hypocrites, after presuming upon God's kindness, we tend to take a next step, and the next step we take is we become self-righteous.

We become self-righteous about ourselves. We begin to think highly of ourselves, and we become judgmental and critical towards other people. Now, why does that happen?

Why does that almost inevitably happen? This is why. If we're focused on judging other people, if we're focused on criticizing other people, it helps us justify our ongoing independence from God.

[12 : 27] Right? As long as we're critiquing and judging other people, as long as we can find somebody else who is worse than we are, it makes us feel good about ourselves, and it helps us justify our ongoing rebellion against God.

I speed because everybody else speeds worse than me. You know what I mean? I mean, when I get on the road, everybody else is speeding.

Well, that makes me feel really good. Yeah, I'll clip along at a good pace. And particularly, as long as somebody else is going just a little bit further than me, I feel very confident going past speed traps.

You know what I mean? As long as I can see somebody else who is offending worse than me, it makes me feel good about myself. And the strategy is for us to focus upon other people's faults so you can justify your own faults.

Now, the root of hypocrisy is presumption. But it's like a tree that grows up and flowers and blooms and bears fruit of self-righteousness.

[13 : 40] You're critiquing others, and over time you become blind to your own issues. But then there's a harvest. And the harvest of hypocrisy is judgment.

Look at verse 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.

Now, verse 4 made me nervous. Verse 5 is scary. Because verse 5 shows us, you know, hypocrisy is not just dumb and irritating.

Hypocrisy is horrifically dangerous. Because the thing is, God is not fooled by our hypocrisy.

I might be fooled by my hypocrisy. I might be convinced by my religious attempts and self-justifying and self-righteous attempts to convince myself I'm okay.

[14 : 45] I may fool myself. I may fool other people. But God does not, is not fooled by BS. Look down at verse 16.

We didn't read verse 16, but we'll read it next week. Look down at verse 16. Paul's talking about a day, on that day, when according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men by Christ Jesus. I know the judgment of God, the idea of the judgment of God is very difficult. It's a very difficult concept for a lot of us to deal with.

For all of us to deal with. But if you think about hypocritical religion, if you think about the ravages it has made upon humanity and human history, if you think about just the horrific evil that has been perpetrated upon the world by hypocritical religion, friend, you can see why it is that God will not put up with it for forever.

And as hard as this is, we need to take seriously the fact that there will be a day when God will peer into your life. God will peer into my life and He will look at what I have done.

[16 : 11] He will look at the state of my heart and He will see past all the BS. He will see past all the facades and the tactics I've used to hide.

He will peer into my heart and He will detect every trace of hypocrisy. He will smell it. And on that day, on the judgment day, God will give to the hypocrite the thing that the hypocrite has always wanted most.

You see, hypocrites, I've mentioned this before, hypocrites want independence from God. It's what they want more than anything else and they use religion as a smokescreen to hide behind so that they can find that independence.

And on the last day, God will grant them exactly what they wanted. God will grant them eternal independence.

Eternal independence from Himself. Eternal independence from His kindness. Eternal independence from His love. And the day after, the day of judgment, all that will be left for the religious hypocrite will be the tribulation and the distress of absolute perfect aloneness.

[17 : 37] They'll have exactly what they've wanted. Okay, that's hypocritical religion. Now let's talk about authentic repentance.

And I want to do the exact same thing. What's the root? The fruit and the harvest. The root, first of all, of repentance is God's kindness.

Look at verse 4 again and focus in on that very last phrase of verse 4. God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance. Now, I want you to see the contrast here.

Remember, the hypocrite uses God's kindness as an excuse to stay away from God. An authentically repentant person, the exact opposite happens.

An authentically repentant person sees the kindness of God and it draws them closer to God. This happened all the time in Jesus' ministry.

[18 : 44] You read through the Gospels, you see this happening again and again. Do you remember the story of Zacchaeus, just as an example? Remember? Short guy, tall tree, climbs up the sycamore tree.

Remember from Sunday school? Yeah. Okay. You can read about it in Luke chapter 19. And the thing with Zacchaeus is that he was a jerk.

He was a cheat. He was a tax collector and he collected more tax than he was supposed to so that he would, basically he was stealing from people and everybody knew it and everybody hated him.

And then Jesus comes into town and Jesus, you know, sees him up in the sycamore tree, says, Zacchaeus, come down. I'm coming to your house for dinner tonight. Now, that doesn't sound all that weird to you and I, but it was absolutely massive for Zacchaeus because at the time, moral people did not eat with immoral people.

It just didn't happen. It wasn't appropriate. And so when Jesus said, Zacchaeus, I'm coming over to your house, Zacchaeus realized that Jesus was showing him just absolute, phenomenal mercy, amazing kindness.

[20 : 03] Now, do you remember how Zacchaeus responded to Jesus' kindness? Do you remember the story? They're sitting at dinner and, I mean, Zacchaeus said, look, even though I'm a scoundrel, Jesus comes and wants to have dinner with me.

That means I should just go on cheating people. That's not what happened. What happened is he saw the kindness of Jesus and there's Jesus sitting at the table with Zacchaeus and something clicks in Zacchaeus.

All Zacchaeus' life he had been running from God, but all of a sudden when he sees the kindness of Jesus, something switches in him and he stands up and he says, Jesus, I'm giving back all the money I've stolen plus I'm giving a bunch of the money that I legitimately have collected.

Jesus' kindness drew Zacchaeus closer to him. And that's what always happens when you truly catch the kindness of God.

When you truly see the beauty of God's kindness, there's something remarkably attractive about it. It makes you want to go closer to God, not far or further away from him.

[21 : 23] It makes you want to push aside everything that could possibly be an obstacle between you and God. Every sin, you want to throw it away and you want to just get closer to somebody like that, somebody with that kind of kindness, that kind of mercy.

Have you ever seen things that are beautiful? Part of the definition of beauty is that it is attractive, right? When you see a mountain, I mean, when you see these mountains out here, doesn't it make you want to go to them?

Don't you want to go up them? Climb them or something? When you go through a museum and you see a beautiful piece of art, doesn't it make you want to sit down on the funny little bench that they have in front of it and just look for a bit?

There's something attractive about beauty and the beauty of God's kindness draws us closer to him. Okay, that's the root of repentance. But then again, the tree grows and it blossoms and it bears fruit and the fruit of repentance is good works.

Look at verse 6. It says, God will render to each one according to his works. To those who by patience and well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.

[22 : 46] Now again, Paul's talking about the judgment day right there. And like we were just saying, God's, the last day, God's going to sort out the imposters from the real followers and things like that.

And the way God is going to determine the phony hypocrites from the authentically repentant people is God's going to inspect the fruit.

According to verse 6 and 7, God's going to look at our works. And here's the question that God's going to ask on the last day. God is going to ask the question, how did you respond to my kindness?

How did you respond to my grace? Did you respond to my kindness like Zacchaeus did? Did you respond to my kindness verse 7 by seeking after glory and honor and immortality, which is another way of saying, did you respond to my kindness by seeking me?

or did you respond to God's kindness verse 8 by using it as an excuse to seek yourself, your own independence, as an excuse to not obey the truth?

[24 : 04] Think about Zacchaeus again. After Zacchaeus gave back all the money that he had stolen, right then, Jesus gets up, he points at Zacchaeus and he says, everybody, that's the real thing.

That's what a real repentance looks like. That's a true son of Abraham. Today, salvation has come to this house. Now, why did Jesus say that?

He said it because Zacchaeus' actions, Zacchaeus is giving away his property, I mean, giving away the money he's stolen. Zacchaeus' actions proved that money was no longer his true God.

Zacchaeus' actions proved that God was now his highest priority. Money wasn't his highest priority. Zacchaeus wasn't his own highest priority.

God was his highest priority. God was going to look at our works as evidence to see how did we respond to God's mercy and kindness.

[25 : 21] Now, I need to be very clear about something and I want you to listen to this. You ready? You listening? This passage is not teaching that we earn our salvation. I don't want that thought to even enter into your mind.

Just clear it out of your mind. Salvation is entirely by God's kindness and by his mercy. We could never in a billion years earn our salvation.

What this passage is teaching us is that our life will demonstrate, will give evidence to how we respond to God's grace. Did we truly receive it or did we just use it to get our own way?

That'll be the question. So, authentic repentance is rooted in God's kindness, its fruit is good works and its harvest is eternal life. Now, I want to show you something here.

Do you remember how I said that the thing a hypocrite really wants is independence from God?

And at the last day, God will give a hypocrite exactly what a hypocrite has always wanted. He will give them independence from God for forever.

[26 : 32] The exact opposite will happen for those who repent. Because authentic Christians are people who didn't deserve the kindness of God.

We could never deserve the kindness of God, but we receive the kindness of God and that kindness changes us and makes us desire God more than anything else and we want to push away everything that could be an obstacle to getting closer to God.

We begin to seek after glory and honor and immortality. Verse 7 And at the last day, God will give us exactly what we most wanted.

God will give himself. Verse 10 God gives glory and honor and peace. Peace. We'll find out later in the book of Romans. Peace is a word that talks about the relational reconciliation between sinners and God.

He will give glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good for the Jew first and also for the Greek. Now, all this needs to be more than just academic thoughts.

[27 : 43] It's easy to talk about these things in the abstract. It's easy to talk about, you know, hypocrites, bad, religious people, or not religious people, but repentant people, good, you know, that kind of thing.

That doesn't cut it. The question is, where is the hypocrisy in your heart? Where is the hypocrisy hiding out in my heart?

Because it loves to thrive in people like me. So, where is it hiding? Where is its layer in my heart? And the best thing, the best way for us to find out where our hypocrisy is hiding out is to ask the

question, how do you respond to God's kindness?

How do you respond to God's kindness? I mean, when you hear about, when you hear about Jesus and all that He's done for you, how does it affect you?

When you see Jesus hanging upon the cross, looking out at the Pharisees, looking out at the hypocrites, the religious hypocrites who nailed Him to the cross, and when you hear Jesus say, Father, forgive them because they know not what they do, how does that strike you?

[29 : 03] How does that affect you? Does it make your heart swell with gratitude? Do you hear Him saying to you, praying for your forgiveness? Or do you hear the kindness of God and it just kind of, well, it just kind of rolls off your back?

Sure. I would hope He'd do something like that. Does the kindness of God cause you to want to draw closer to God?

Does it attract you to God? Or is it one of the excuses you give to continue habits in your life that are contrary to God's will? Does the kindness of God make you want to sell your possessions, give to the poor, stand up, and follow Jesus?

Or is the kindness of God just the kind of background noise in your religious life? Now those are the questions that need to ring in our ears. And if you find yourself, if you find yourself saying, no, I am a hypocrite in all sorts of areas of my life.

I have presumed upon the kindness of God. Then the antidote, the antidote is to flee toward the kindness of God.

[30 : 30] The antidote is to flee to the cross of Christ and to hear Him speak to you. Father, forgive them. Father, forgive them. Just like He prayed for the Sadducees and the Pharisees and the religious establishment that put Him there.

He'll pray for you tonight. He'll forgive you. and He will restore you. And He will change your desires so that instead of wanting to live apart from Him, you will desire to live with Him, pursuing Him. And He will store up for you eternal pleasure on the Day of Judgment. And that will be for you a beautiful day. Amen.