

**Intro:**

I have entitled this message ‘*The Moral Man's Treasure*’.

What do you suppose is the moral man’s treasure? What is it that he is treasuring up in his life?

In my illustration file on ‘treasure’, I found many references to money.

I found one story about the Robert E. Lee mine in Leadville, CO.

- Purchased by a successful prospector for \$16,000 in 1877.
- Hired a crew, sank a shaft more than 100 feet deep, found no ore.
- Mining syndicate offered him \$30,000 for the mine, sent word to his men to pick up their tools and quit.
- Men were in the midst of drilling a hole and putting dynamite in it – asked if they could just shoot this one more hole.  
    *“No, come up! I won't put another cent into this hole.”*
- New owners ‘shot’ his last hole and exposed a vein of silver so rich that in 24 hours they had mined 95 tons of ore worth \$118,500, at a cost of exactly \$60.<sup>1</sup>

We all understand that kind of treasure. In fact, as men, we understand too well what that kind of treasure does to us. In my files there is one of those “genie” stories:

- Elderly man finds a lamp on a beach, starts cleaning it, a genie appears (of course).
- Genie offers the man a wish, the man responds: “My brother and I had a fight 30 years ago and he hasn't spoken to me since. I wish that he'll finally forgive me.”
- There was a thunderclap, and the genie declared, “Your wish has been granted. You know,” the genie continued, “most men would have asked for wealth or fame. But you only wanted the love of your brother. Is it because you are old and dying?”
- “No way!” the man cried. “But my brother is, and he's worth about \$60 million.”<sup>2</sup>

So we understand this kind of treasure! But what category of men are we describing who make this their treasure? Are they moral men?

What does the moral man treasure?

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<sup>1</sup> Irving Stone, *Men To Match My Mountains*, p. 438.

<sup>2</sup> Joan C. Brown, *Reader's Digest*, 9/1/89, p. 101.

We are going to read our passage, and I think you will see what I am aiming for, then we will see if I can make my case.

Read Rm 2.1-5

To get a bit of a running start on our message, we need to recall a bit of where we are:

**Romans 1** lays out God's ongoing display of wrath against the willful ignorance of the wicked man of the world.

**Romans 2.1** turns our attention to the moral man who is 'Amening' the apostle in chapter 1: "Amen, Paul, quite so, they deserve it."

- The moral man also has no excuse, no defense
- The moral man thinks he stands because "I am better than them"
- Paul says to the moral man, 'No, you will be judged by the same standard for you do the same things.'

That brings us to this next section of verses. Paul is going to begin laying bear every defense the moral man will try to offer.

**Proposition:** The moral man, who morally judges sin, must realize that a day of accounting is certainly coming in which he will receive his due reward.

## I. Surety of righteous judgement (2)

A. The rightness of God's judgement is stated as an 'axiomatic' truth

What do we mean by 'axiomatic'?

1. "To know for a fact, by external testimony"<sup>3</sup>
2. "He means by this that it is an incontestable truth with respect to which he will not allow any hesitation. He states it as an axiom of thought apart from which we cannot speak of *God's* judgment. For God is truth (*cf.* 3.4)."<sup>4</sup>
3. Something that "everyone knows"<sup>5</sup>

In other words, Paul offers this statement as a given, something everyone must agree on.

<sup>3</sup> William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 55.

<sup>4</sup> John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 57.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Hodge, *Romans*, p. 45.

He is saying that the moral man himself agrees with this.

- B. The rightness of God's judgement is with respect to 'the one's practicing such things'
1. A sign-post pointing back to chapter 1
  2. "Everyone knows" that judgement of such wicked deeds are *according to truth* — **truth demands wicked deeds be punished**

A man brutally rapes and murders a young child – the community reacts in horror, demanding punishment.  
Why?

- Because according to truth, such deeds should be punished.
- When a light sentence (or an early parole) is granted for such a crime, the community also reacts in horror — same principle.

- C. But even more than community judgement, we are sure (we hold this axiomatically) that God is right to punish such deeds

1. God judges according to truth
  - a. With all facts in view
  - b. With exactly appropriate judgement

This is rooted in general revelation about God: God is great and God is good.  
Men agree that when God judges, he judges according to truth, and...

2. God should judge such deeds according to truth

So the moral man finds himself in agreement with the proposition of the apostle: "we know that the judgement of God is according to truth against all who do such things"  
"This general principle is that upon which the teaching of the succeeding verses is based. God's truth and equity govern his judgments and there are special privileges for none."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 57.

## II. Consequent insecurity of the moral man's presuppositions (3-4)

A. The futility of supposing that somehow you will be overlooked (3)

1. The moral man's thinking has been skewed

a. "Thinkest thou" = "Logics thou"

b. The essential question: Do you reason out in your mind that somehow you will escape?

2. A reminder of who Paul is talking to

a. You, yes, you

b. You, O man

c. You, who are judging those who practice such things

d. You, who are also doing the same things

Now, remember, 'doing the same things' doesn't mean that everyone who judges the sins of someone else is doing *exactly the same* deed, but he is doing the *same kind* of deeds.

Who is Paul talking to? The moral man – the one who looks at the crimes of others and says, "That's wrong, they shouldn't be doing that."

- Who hasn't experienced some injustice at the hands of an employer? (Only those who have never been employed!)
- How do you react if you are unjustly treated? Cheated, or imposed upon in some way?
- But then, have you always been scrupulous to be working when you are on the clock?

There are any number of scenarios where Paul's finger here is pointed directly at *you* (and me).

3. The apostle is very emphatic: "you ... yes, you"

a. "You" is in emphatic position

b. Lit. "Are you reasoning [logic -ing] this, that 'thou, of all men'<sup>7</sup> should escape the judgement of God"

4. Reasons why a man might suppose he could escape

a. Right race: many commentators think Paul is addressing the Jews here

1) I don't think so

2) But the Jews did think that they should escape the judgement the Gentiles deserved because they were Jews

b. Right social standing: a man is a well-known doer of good works in our town

1) Volunteer organizations

2) Public service (apparently selfless and dedicated)

3) Good family

c. Right morality: a man is known for his integrity

1) Cheats no one

2) Doesn't lie

3) Is kind to all

Paul is asking this question, if this is you, do you think you can 'flee out of' the wrath of God?

- Because no matter how moral or righteous you might think yourself to be, you do practice the same kind of things as the wicked.

"The sense of the verse shows that Paul is questioning this person's belief that he ... will be able to escape this judgment of God. Such a question is legitimately put to the Gentile moralist or philosopher who thinks he ... can please God by his ... good life."<sup>8</sup>

We already agree: God judges righteously.

We must now agree: you won't escape just because you agree with God about judging sin.

But there is more...

B. The guilt of despising God's goodness and grace (4)

<sup>7</sup> William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 55.

<sup>8</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 132.

1. The literal word order of our verse:  
'or the riches of his kindness and forbearance and longsuffering are you despising?'

Paul is ratcheting up the argument another notch.

2. What are the riches of God's goodness, etc?
  - a. The riches of God's goodness: "the kindness that disposes one to do good"<sup>9</sup>
  - b. The riches of God's forbearance: "the forbearance which suspends punishment"<sup>10</sup>
  - c. The riches of God's longsuffering: "patience, which waits long before it actively interposes"<sup>11</sup>

This is in the category of Mt 5.45: "he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."

- God blesses all men, gives them life and opportunity [general principle]
- God doesn't immediately judge every man as soon as he sins — no one would be alive if he did

3. How does the moral man despise the riches of God's goodness?
  - a. He thinks since God has not judged him yet, it is ok to continue on his own way
  - b. He thinks lightly of God's goodness, barely acknowledging it as from God, if at all
  - c. He fails to realize that God's goodness is designed to lead him to the place of repentance

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<sup>9</sup> James Denney, "St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans" in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, W. Robertson Nicoll, ed., p. 595.

<sup>10</sup> James Denney, "St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans" in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, W. Robertson Nicoll, ed., p. 595.

<sup>11</sup> James Denney, "St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans" in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, W. Robertson Nicoll, ed., p. 595.

God is capable of *making* you repent. Witness Pharaoh – is that what it will take for you?

- In fact, even when God deals with people severely, they manifest an amazing persistence in bitter rebellion.
- But make no mistake, God can make you bow the knee.

But God is good to you. God waits for you. God tolerates you — to *lead you* to repentance.

The Rabbis had a tradition that God sends his Anger and Wrath off at a great distance so that men would have time to repent. They made this like a story of a human king.

- The king had two fierce legions who were very loyal to their king.
- The king stationed these legions afar off lest any of his subjects might provoke him (and them) and the legions fall on them too quickly.

One Rabbi even went so far as to say God locks up his Anger and Wrath to allow men room to repent.

But this is a low view of God!

- God is not like an impetuous, uncontrolled man.
- God simply wills to send rain on the just and the unjust.
- God forbears by his will to bring the full force of his wrath against men

God is good to man in order to bring men to repentance.

### III. Ultimate reality of only accumulating wrath (5)

A. You, O man, have a hard heart

1. Instead of repenting, you are resisting
2. While resisting, you are treasuring up wrath

It is like the miser who gathers to gether his hoard of coins, his treasure, his “thesaurus”, one coin at a time.

- So one resistance of God's grace and God's goodness is adding as a treasure one drop of wrath into the safe of the moral man.
- What is it like for a self-righteous man who hears a sermon like this and rejects it?

B. You, O man, will receive your treasure in the day of judgement

1. Lit. 'treasuring up to thyself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgement of God'
2. The moral man agrees that God's judgement is according to truth (2)
3. The moral man, complacent in his morality, simply waits while treasuring up more wrath for himself in the Day of Wrath which is to come.

### Conclusion:

Our message was entitled *The Moral Man's Treasure*. What is the thing he is treasuring up for himself? Wrath — wrath instead of approval, wrath in spite of delay, wrath for him with no escape...

The city of Pompeii in Italy was destroyed by an ancient volcanic eruption. The whole city was encased in hot volcanic ash which preserved much of the ancient city and made it a treasure of information concerning the lives of ancient Romans and gave various insights into human character of those who were buried alive there.

- A body found there, the body of a woman, with her feet turned toward the city gate.
- Her face was turned backwards, toward something that lay just beyond the reach of her outstretched hands when death overtook her.
- What was she reaching for? A bag of pearls.  
Perhaps she had dropped them.  
Perhaps someone else had dropped them and she desired them for herself.
- In her haste to escape the volcano, she turned to pick up a treasure of pearls and received the wrath of Vesuvius instead.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> N. Bruce Creswell, "Greed," *Leadership Magazine*, Fall 1989, p. 51.

The moral man rushes through life, striving to be more righteous than his neighbour, to be better thought of, to have a good reputation, to be known as “a good guy”... and he ignores God.

He ignores the goodness and longsuffering of God.

He ignores the call to confess, repent, and believe.

And he is building a treasure, a treasure of wrath, a pot of golden fury that he embraces to his bosom as it is built up, drop by drop, bit by bit.