

What's the Problem with "Moralism"?



To ask the question seems almost irreverent. Isn't the church supposed to produce moral people? What's wrong with being moral? Well, nothing. But there IS something very wrong and very deadly about *moralism*. In fact, *moralism* is deadly to the church and to Christianity. Rather than give a definition of moralism right off the bat, let's turn to a *description* of moralism found in what is considered by many to be T-H-E greatest letter of Paul, the epistle to the Christians in the church in Rome.

What does *Romans 1:20ff* say about those who reject God and leave Him out of life's equation? How would most "church people" respond to Paul's inspired assessment? What happens, however in 2:1? Most people would "AMEN!" Paul until 2:1, then they would think he'd "... quit preachin' and gone to meddlin' ... " Fact is, those who point the long, boney finger of accusation at others are at the same time pointing 3 fingers back at themselves.

Whenever you substitute moralism for real, authentic, Biblical Christianity, you have major problems!

1. A Moralist does NOT understand SIN.

Why is that a MAJOR problem? Until you understand SIN, then you have no real idea of what you need to repent of! And moralists have a shallow, superficial view of sin.

What is a MORALIST? A moralist is a FAULT—FINDING person who is OBSESSED with the sin of OTHER people but OBLIVIOUS to his/her own sin.

Some examples from 1:29 and 2:1 of moralism, cf *Matthew 5:27-29*... The "buffet" approach . . . We pick out the sins of others we want to focus on while ignoring the underlying sins. Jesus puts lust and adultery into the same category, as well as murder and hatred. We slice the bologna thinner than that and pronounce ourselves "not guilty" when it comes to those more flagrant sins.

Here's a simplified word picture to help us understand the problem moralists have with sin, cf *Matthew 5:48*... Let's say we boiled down our whole duty to God in one commandment: Thou shalt jump to the moon. Well, some may jump higher than others, but we all share the same problem: We can't reach the moon by jumping. When Jesus said to be PERFECT, He might as well have told us to jump to the moon. We can't be perfect. Moralists don't really understand that.

What is THE standard for a moralist? It is himself / herself. I jump higher than you do, so I join the ranks of "sister Bertha better-than-you" (from Ray Steven's *MS Squirrel Revival*). What is the Truth the Lord knows about us? When you break the Law, you break it. It's not a plate glass window. It's 1 big pane.

2. A moralist does NOT understand GRACE.

According to *Vv 4-5*, as well as *Luke 15*, who is grace NOT for? It's NOT for GOOD people who think somehow they can be good enough to get right with God.

The problem here is one of SELF-CENTERED SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS. For a moralist, like the older brother in the story of the Prodigal Son or like the Pharisee in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican (NOT the "Republican"), is too busy condemning others to look in the mirror of his own sin.

What is the common problem moralists share? *Vv 8-9* . . . Moralists cannot wrap their minds around the fact that the ONLY THING that makes them right with God is GRACE + NOTHING. What Truth do moralists not grasp? Cf *Romans 1:16-17* ... They never "get" the Gospel. God's not going to look at our moral resume. Praise God, He's going to look at Christ's record; and since a Christian is united by Faith to Christ alone, what Jesus did for us on our behalf will be sufficient.

Do you find yourself in *Luke 23:43* or not? The only difference between the condemned criminal on the cross and us is that we know not when our time's up. We ask for the moon, and by God's grace alone, that's what we get!