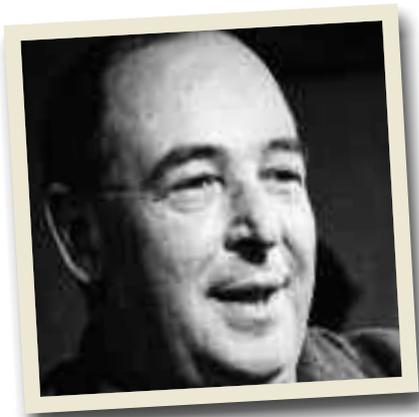




Good News for All

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In his *Abolition of Man* (1943; reprint, New York: Collier Books, 1955), C. S. Lewis defended the objectivity of values, such as beauty and goodness, in contrast to the modern notion that such qualities are merely individualistic. Lewis wrote, “Until quite modern times all teachers and even all men believed the universe to be such that certain emotional reactions on our part could be either congruous or incongruous to it—believed, in fact, that objects did not merely receive, but could *merit*, our approval or disapproval, our reverence, or our contempt” (p. 25).



Lewis argued that the universal acknowledgement of values and virtues is based upon natural revelation, as structured by the Creator (he called this the *Tao*). He argued that natural law (or objective morality) is essential to the wellbeing of humanity.

The objectivity of values means that one person may be correct and another wrong. For example, if someone regards a sunset as beautiful and another does not, then is only one person correct? The same could be asked with regard to the goodness and badness of actions, as opposed to the modern notion that such values are merely matters of opinion. Lewis argued that the universal acknowledgement of values and virtues is based upon natural revelation, as structured by the Creator (he called this the *Tao*). “The human mind has no more power of inventing a new value than of imagining a new primary colour, or indeed, of creating a new sun and a new sky for it to move in” (pp. 56-57).

Rejection of the *Tao* is a disaster for humanity because then values, such as dignity and freedom, become meaningless. When human beings are regarded merely as parts of nature, then both can be conquered through technology. However, when technology has no limitations, it becomes totalitarian (or technocratic). Human beings are held in the control of an elite “inner ring” as technocracy advances, and these privileged few determine plans for future generations, with that of the present disconnected from the past.

Lewis argued that natural law (or objective morality) is essential to the wellbeing of humanity. He was increasingly concerned that modern society is without “chests” (i.e. the higher emotions that are absolutely essential to harmonize the cerebral and the sensual), which would lead eventually to the abolition of man. Humanity “without chests” is the worship of one’s own mind and passions (a moral relativism that destroys the chest and removes morality). Romans 2 focuses upon God’s written law (the conscience, or *Tao*, as Lewis called it) upon the human heart, and how this proves that the

gospel (“good news”) of God’s grace is relevant for all humanity.

EVERYONE NEEDS THE GOOD NEWS

Romans 2 serves as a warning to those who may be neglecting or overlooking the demonstration of God’s righteousness. Romans 1:18-32 addresses those who suppress the knowledge of God, and progress from idolatry to immorality, and finally embrace an attitude of invincibility against God (v. 32, “they know the ordinance of God,” yet “practice such things” that are degrading, as if there would be no consequences for their actions). Scripture first addressed the declining spiritual history of those who have not heard of salvation in Jesus Christ, yet who are, nonetheless, accountable for their response to God, as is the person who has heard the gospel message.

The moral person must also consider God’s righteousness. Whereas the previous section described the non-religious (pagan) person, Romans 2 addresses those who are proud that they are morally superior to others. For the Jewish people, such attitudes resulted from the fact that they possessed the revealed Law of God, which they promised to obey (Exod 19–20). However, possessing the Law is not enough since God requires obedience, and by that standard both the non-moral and moral person “fall short of the glory of God.” *Everyone needs the “good news” of God’s grace, which is granted—by grace—through faith in Jesus Christ.*

Even for those who may not possess God’s revealed Law, there is God’s Law “written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them” (Romans 2:15). The Law upon the heart may be regarded as “natural revelation,” which was often



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MORAL PEOPLE NEED THE GOOD NEWS

(Rom 2:1-16) Romans 2 is directly related to the previous content with the “therefore” of verse 1. Whereas the pagan individual gives “heartly approval” to sin, the person described in 2:1 does not give approval to sinful living; rather, this individual “passes judgment” upon them, yet still is unable to “escape the judgment of God.” Truly, it is unjustifiable to pass judgment upon another's sin, because to be impatient regarding someone else demonstrates contempt for the patience that God grants toward our sin and us.

The reason why the moral person is just as guilty as the non-moral individual is that in judging others, this person condemns himself/herself by practicing “the same things,” even though the acts themselves may be different. Therefore, the moral person also does not understand the judgment of God. The subsequent verses expound the assertion, and develop the notion that God will not declare the moral person as justified. (*Justification* is a legal [forensic] term with regard to acquittal; it refers to God's action, as the holy and righteous Sovereign, whereby He makes human beings, who are sinners and worthy of condemnation, to be made acceptable before Him.)

Verses 1-16 are based upon a noteworthy truth, which is that people often do not heed the moral codes that they establish for themselves. The moral person will construct moral rules, and even then will be found lacking God's righteousness when the Lord judges his or her life by those self-ordained rules. The reality of God's judgment is assumed. The characteristics of God's judgment are threefold: (1) it is without error (v. 2, “rightly

codified through international laws and national treaties. The natural law (the *Tao*) served as the basis for God's judgment of those who were not the recipients of the Mosaic legislation. The message is the same as that given in James 4:17 (“Therefore, to one who knows *the* right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin”).

Romans 2 is a component of a longer discussion that began in 1:18 and will conclude with 3:20, having demonstrated the universal need of all humanity for God's righteousness. Romans 1:18-32 proved that the non-religious (pagan) individual, who has never heard the name of Christ Jesus, is just as accountable for responding to God as is the person who is informed regarding the name of the Lord. Scripture argues that both the moral person (2:1-16) and the religious person (2:17–3:8) have no more ability than the pagan to earn salvation, based upon the merits of their own work. None of the three types of individuals can achieve the divine requirements for salvation; hence the conclusion in 3:9-20, which could be summarized with a single verse: “As it is written, ‘THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE’ (v. 10).



Who are the people whose sin you tend to judge? What are the excuses used to validate your judgment? What are the aspects of God's will that you know, yet do not currently practice? Have we been hypocritical in teaching others spiritual matters or principles that we are not practicing?

falls"); (2) it is based upon one's actions (v. 6, "ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS"); and, (3) it is unbiased (v. 11, "for there is no partiality with God").

Two groups are identified in verse 12: those without the Bible and those who possess the Word of God. Even without the Bible, one is condemned because God's Law is written upon the heart (the conscience); additionally, there is the revelation of God in creation, which Romans 1 mentioned. Both the conscience and the revelation of God in creation are sufficient to condemn all humanity.

RELIGIOUS PEOPLE NEED THE GOOD NEWS

(Rom 2:17-29) The next individual addressed is the religious person, who is immersed in formal religious observance and believes such actions will merit God's favor. The reason for the condemnation is that much of what the religious person values has no worth in achieving salvation (2:17-29). The specific works of which a religious person is proud are worthless, since they are without faith in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Philippians 3:1-15 demonstrates the folly of depending upon works to achieve eternal salvation. Only when one gains Christ can he/she understand that "confidence in the flesh" is "rubbish." The instruction all throughout the Bible is not to have confidence in one's own strength or works; rather, believers are told the advantage of knowing the living Lord and Savior.

Merely approving "the things that are essential" (Rom 2:18), which means being discerning with regard to spiritual matters, is irrelevant if one's be-

lief is inconsistent with his/her lifestyle. Commending essential spiritual matters is good, yet it is not sufficient unless such consent is also appropriated. Trust in others or self can sometimes be the precise reason why problems arise in one's life (because one has not learned to depend upon God in a biblical manner). The problem is that the religious person is guilty of the precise attitudes and behaviors that he/she deems objectionable in someone else's life (cf. vv. 19-20).

Romans 2 addresses a very modern phenomenon: claiming to believe the Bible, yet not living by the principles of Scripture. God is concerned that the hearts of His people are properly related to Him (vv. 28-29). God desires the faith of His people to be expressed *both* inwardly and outwardly. The believer's heart must be circumcised (revealed) by God, which is accomplished by the Word of God (cf. Heb 4:12). If the Christian is not careful in this regard, he/she may produce praise from human beings, yet not from God (cf. 1 Sam 16:6-7; Matt 23:5-7).

Many personal questions arise from this month's article. Who are the people whose sin you tend to judge? What are the excuses used to validate your judgment? What are the aspects of God's will that you know, yet do not currently practice? Have we been hypocritical in teaching others spiritual matters or principles that we are not practicing? If others were to see into our heart and mind, would it be inconsistent with our external behavior? Have we given thanks to God for granting the blessing of knowing and pleasing Him?

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