

Choosing Oranges Over Diamonds

The Perfect Judge Part II

Romans 2:4

Introduction

William Sangster was a well-known pastor from England. He lived during the time of the disaster of the Titanic. In one of his sermons, he repeated an interesting story from that tragic accident that illustrates the issue of priorities.

A frightened woman on the Titanic had already found her place in the lifeboat that was about to be dropped into the raging North Atlantic. She suddenly thought of something she needed in light of death that was breathing down her neck. She asked to be able to go to her state room. She was granted just a moment or so, or they would have to lower away without her. She got out and ran across the deck that was already at a dangerous angle. She ran through the gambling room that had money piled ankle deep on the floor. She ignored it all, not even reaching down to grab a few bills. She came to her stateroom and ran inside to a shelf above her bed. There, her jewelry box sat and in it was her diamond jewelry. She shoved it aside and it crashed to floor. Behind that box, sitting on the shelf, were three small oranges. She grabbed them and ran back to the lifeboat and climbed on board.

Sangster wrote,

Death had boarded the Titanic. One blast of its awful breath had transformed all values. Instantaneously, priceless things had become worthless. Worthless things had become priceless. In that moment of life or death – she preferred oranges to diamonds.¹

In the book of Romans, Paul describes, for us, the foolishness of man, throughout history, as he distorts

the priorities of life and inverts the value of everything.

The apostle Paul wrote in Romans, chapter 2, verse 4,

Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?

Remember:

- chapter 1 has explained the guilt and sinfulness of immoral people,
- chapter 2 is in the process of describing the guilt and sinfulness of moral, upstanding people,
- chapter 3 will chronicle the guilt and sinfulness of religious people.

Thus, all the world is proven guilty before a holy God.

And what is the root of the problem with the moral people in Romans, chapter 2? In a few words, they are on a sinking boat, but they would rather collect diamonds than oranges.

Defining Values

For the sake of applying the metaphor, let me define it this way:

Oranges

- An orange represents those things that are permanently valuable according to God's point of view.

Diamonds

- A diamond is something that is preferred by mankind, but is only of temporary value.

And what does moral man prefer – oranges or diamonds? Paul answers that question by asking a rhetorical question in verse 4. Look again,

. . . do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience . . . ?

Paul expects them to answer, “Yes, we do that.”

The phrase, “to think lightly,” translates the Greek word *kataphroneo*, (*καταφρονεω*), which literally means, “to look down on; to underestimate the true value of”.

A. T. Robertson, the Greek scholar from a generation ago, commented on this phrase in this context, that the moral man actually looks down on God.

Have you ever talked to an unbeliever who prided themselves on their own morals and reputation? Have you noticed the way they will speak of God as revealed in scripture? “Surely God would not be foolish enough to judge the world. I can’t imagine God doing the things you say the Bible says He does. If God were really God, He certainly wouldn’t say those things or condemn those things or teach those things . . .”

In his arrogance, the moral man is actually considering himself to be better than and wiser than God. He is, in the words of Paul, looking down on God.

The Riches of God’s Heart

Now Paul, in verse 4, specifically mentions three things that the moral man underestimates. They are true riches from the heart of God toward mankind in general. Yet, these things, of infinite value, are disregarded in man’s pursuit of diamonds, which have only temporary value.

The Gift of Kindness – The Goodness of God

1. The first valuable from the treasure house of God’s heart is the gift of kindness – or the goodness of God.

Paul writes,

. . . do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness . . .

The Greek word for “kindness” is “*chrestotes*,” (*χρηστοτης*), which is often translated “goodness”.

The first act

- The first acts of God’s goodness appeared at creation, as recorded in Genesis, chapter 1, verses 3 and 4.

Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good . . .

Skip to verse 10b.

. . . and God saw that it was good.

Again, in verse 12b,

. . . and God saw that it was good.

The first appearance of something good, related to mankind, is observed at creation.

The full effect

- The full effect, however, of God’s goodness is seen by all creation.

Every person who has ever lived has personally experienced the goodness of God in many ways. We call this the common grace or the common goodness of God.

The Psalmist wrote, in chapter 33, verse 5b of the King James Version,

The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.

Everyone benefits from the goodness of God, whether they realize it or not. In Matthew, chapter 5, verse 45b, we read that God causes the rain to fall “on the righteous and the unrighteous”. That is common goodness.

One author wrote,

He gives both the righteous and the unrighteous food to eat, fire to keep warm, water to quench thirst. He gives us [all] blue sky, a warm sun, green grass, and beautiful mountains.

If you were God, it would be different, would it not?! If your neighbor made fun of you for going to church, you would make sure that the rain storm, that came that afternoon, dropped water on every lawn except his. In fact, you would probably see to it that he could not grow any grass at all.

But God does not do that. Your neighbor’s lawn might look better than yours. In fact, his children

might be healthier than yours. He might even get promoted instead of you. It is your refrigerator that breaks down and your lawnmower that does not work.

One of the amazing things about God's goodness is that it extends to unbelievers!

He allows them relationships that bring love and happiness. He gives them the ability to thrill with excitement over the birth of their child or the accomplishment of some life-long project. He gives them a sense of personal worth and an intuitive knowledge of right and wrong. Unbelievers can paint and sing and create and innovate and invent. They write symphonies, build skyscrapers, invent medical cures and computer programs, and put together cable networks . . . I am not giving any names!

The unbeliever can, to a point much greater than we would probably allow, were we God, enjoy life. This is the common grace of a good God.

David lamented in Psalm, chapter 107, verse 8 of the King James Version,

Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness . . .

But they do not do that, do they? They ignore His goodness; they take it for granted.

The moral man looks down his nose at the goodness of God. He is just like the immoral man in Romans, chapter 1, verse 21, where we read,

For even though they knew [about] God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks . . .

Now, my children are being taught to say, "Thank you."

If they do not, I might lean in and say, "What's that? I didn't hear you."

A dad will do that, right?

If I were God, I would make people say, "Thank you."

"Thank you for the rain," or you do not get any more.

"Thank you for the sunshine," or your house will freeze like an ice cube.

"Thank you for that promotion," or "for personal health," . . .

If we were God, we would be running around to everyone saying, "What's that? I didn't hear you!"

Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness . . .

Maybe you have, in fact, experienced some of the suffering of Christ, as He wept over Jerusalem who would not love Him. You have known the pain of giving good gifts to your children, or your parents, over the years, and they will not respond with love. Maybe it is your spouse, or friend, or coworker and you do everything you can, but nothing is enough and they look down on your attempts. Perhaps they even ridicule you for who you are.

You are personally knowing, through experience, what Philippians, chapter 3, verse 10, calls,

. . . the fellowship of Christ's sufferings . . .

When Elizabeth Barrett Browning lived, nearly a century ago, she wrote poems that were read by millions of people. And yet, there is a side of her story that is not as well known. She lived with her parents and siblings in England, where she would write many of her romantic poems. When Elizabeth met Robert Browning, they soon planned to marry, but secretly, because Elizabeth feared her dominating, possessive father. Even as an older woman, she was barely able to get out of his sight. They were so afraid that they actually married and, for several weeks after their marriage, Elizabeth continued to live at home. Finally, the secret was discovered and her parents responded to Elizabeth by disowning her.

Now, as an outcast, she began to write letters to her parents. She wrote letters every week, for a period of ten years, explaining why she did what she did. She even apologized for secretly marrying and asked for their forgiveness, while expressing her undying love to them.

Finally, after ten years of writing letters, she received, in the mail, a box from her mother and father. She was so excited. Perhaps now there would be understanding and reconciliation. She opened the box and, to her dismay, she discovered, inside the box, all of the letters that she had written to them. Not one of them had been opened.

Paul's point, in Romans, chapter 2, verse 4, is this – the immoral unbeliever and the moral unbeliever are really just the same at heart – they both could not care less about having a personal relationship with God. Yet, God sends them the gift of falling snow; He writes them letters of love on the petals of flowers; He sends His kindness to them at the dawn of every new day.

However, according to Paul, God is the scorned One. He is the ignored lover of men's souls; He is the lovely One who is stepped upon and stepped around and His gifts are trampled underfoot.

Who needs God?!

Paul delivers the charge,

... do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness ...?

Moral man answers, "Yes, the goodness of God is a small orange and we prefer diamonds in our pockets."

The Gift of Forbearance – The Truce of God

That is not all. Paul goes on to mention, in verse 4, that the moral man will,

... think lightly of the riches of His ... forbearance ...

2. Another gift from the heart of God towards all mankind is the gift of forbearance.

That noun only appears twice in the New Testament and both times it is in the letter of Paul to the Romans. That Greek word, "anoche," (ανοχη), comes from the root which means, "to hold back". So, in this verse, it suggests a delay in punishment. In fact, in classical Greek writing, the word referred to a truce of arms.

In other words, God could judge man immediately for his sin, but He has called a temporary truce with sinful man. Judgment is coming, but He graciously holds it in reserve until that final day. In fact, notice verses 5 and 6 of Romans, chapter 2.

But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds

One of the gifts of God to unbelieving mankind is that God does not strike him dead at the first word of blasphemy. He does not judge man immediately. He could and, in fact, He has. The Old Testament is filled with illustration after illustration of God's immediate judgment upon sinful mankind.

But what about now? According to the apostle Paul, there is a truce between God and man, and God, in general, allows evil man to go without judgment while alive.

The ultimate expression

- You have the ultimate expression of God's forbearance toward evil man at the cross of Calvary.

The act of hatred unleashed upon the Savior could have called for the armies of God's angelic hosts to come sweeping down and destroy everyone that dared lift a hand against His Son.

The ongoing extension

- Secondly, you have the ongoing extension of God's forbearance over the last two thousand years of blasphemy, wickedness, and unbelief.

Man has mistaken this truce with inability. They think God cannot judge them and He will not judge them.

In II Peter, chapter 3, verses 3 and 4, the apostle specifically pointed this out, as he wrote,

Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.

In other words, they are saying, "Yea, yea, yea, we keep hearing that God is going to judge us, but nothing has happened for centuries. God isn't going to do anything. In fact, there must not really be a God after all."

Now continue to II Peter, chapter 3, verses 5 through 7.

[But] when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. But the present heavens and earth by His word are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

In other words, one day the truce will end. Judgment is being withheld by the kindness and forbearance of God, but, one day, that will change. The truce will end and judgment will come.

In the meantime, immoral man and moral unbelieving man benefit from one more rich gift from the heart of a kind and forbearing God.

The Gift of Patience – The Longsuffering of God

3. Finally, Paul tells us, in the last part of verse 4, of the riches of God's kindness and forbearance and, now notice,

... *His . . . patience . . .*

The Greek word is the compound word, "makrothumias," (μακροθυμιαις). The first part of the word is "macro," which we use today in our English language to speak of something that is big or great. God's patience is great – it is long, thus this word is often translated, "long-suffering".

In Genesis, chapter 6, that first judgment by water was about to come upon the whole earth. The flood waters would drown every human being on planet earth, except those who accepted the invitation to board the ark. Noah preached and delivered his invitation, but they would not listen. They mocked him and derided him and refused his prophecy of coming judgment. Yet, Noah invited them over and over again.

How long would you invite someone to your home before you finally stopped? Two days? Twenty days? One hundred twenty days? God did not stop inviting them, through Noah, after two days, or twenty days, or one hundred twenty days, but after one hundred twenty years!

There was a standing invitation for one hundred twenty years from God, who is rich in patience.

Bob Ingersoll, who was an atheist, went around, in the early nineteen hundreds, challenging men to debate the existence of God. He was a gifted speaker and, in a day when people did not watch television, they would go and listen to a man, like him, who held rallies and gave speeches against religion. It was shocking, in those days, and he usually gathered quite a crowd. He would stand on a stage and, before hundreds and even thousands of people, take out his pocket watch and say, "If there is a God, let Him strike me dead in thirty seconds."

Then, he would hold up the watch and count down the seconds, "Twenty-nine, twenty-eight, twenty-seven, . . . seven, six, five, four, three, two, one."

People would gasp at such audacity. But, at the end of thirty seconds, he was still standing. He would say, "See, I told you, there is no God . . . there is no God . . . there is no God."

If I were God, at the last second of that countdown, you would hear a "Poof!" and Ingersoll would be a little pile of ashes. Then, in a booming voice from above, I would say, "Yes, there is."

Today, Bob Ingersolls walk the streets of this world by the millions. They teach in your

classrooms; they live in your neighborhood; they work at your job. "There is no God, like the Bible says. We can live our lives the way we want. We can sin and blaspheme and curse and kill and adulterate and manipulate and pontificate! There is no God!"

Besides, Mr. Moral man says, "What do I need God for? I'm in control of my life and I'm getting along just fine. God is not necessary."

And he is left standing. Why? Because God has given them an incredible gift, called patience.

The point is, God does not lose his patience in thirty seconds, or, for that matter, the length of a man's life, or, better yet, the last two thousand years.

That judgment does not come from God is not proof of His powerlessness; it is proof of His patience . . . [the incredible riches of His patience].²

The Response of Man's Heart

Now, what should the response of man's heart be to the heart of God?

Defiance

1. The wrong response is defiance.

That is like a person clinging to a heavy bag of diamonds, those temporary valuables, even while they are drowning. We will not give up our diamonds!

Repentance

2. The second response is repentance.

I have come up with a new definition of repentance. Repentance is changing your mind about oranges!

You might not want to write that down. Someone might find it and then have the evidence they need to prove our church is a cult!

Repentance comes from a word that means, "to change your mind". You change your mind about life, about sin, about priorities, and, ultimately, you change your mind about God. You no longer look down your nose at Him, you love Him and follow Him.

Two Kinds of Repentance

Now, you need to understand that there are two kinds of repentance – worldly sorrow and godly sorrow.

Worldly sorrow

- Worldly sorrow is simply remorse. It is an emotional feeling of being sorry about having been caught or sorry for being in the mess one is in. But, it is short-lived; it does not produce godliness.

Godly sorrow

- The opposite of worldly sorrow is godly sorrow. It is not just remorse, it is a reorientation of the mind, heart, and will.

Remorse is being sorry you got caught in sin; repentance is being sorry you sinned.

Paul writes to the Corinthians, in II Corinthians, chapter 7, verses 9 and 10, and says,

I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, in order that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

And how does God bring an unbeliever to repentance? By the riches of His kindness.

Notice again, Romans, chapter 2, verse 4.

Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?

An old translation renders it, "The goodness of God is gently drawing you."

God draws you in, He does not drive you in. He does not use a club . . . He has chosen to use a cross.³

And the arms of the Savior stretch outward on that cross, as if to say, "Whosoever will, may come."

My friend, do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience?

Unbeliever, the kindness of God has been extended to you today – once again, you have heard the truth of God's love through Jesus Christ. Will you defy Him and look down at His gifts, or accept Him and repent?

Christian friend, it is possible to be caught up in circumstances and decide that God is not so kind

after all, that He is not necessarily good all the time. Our problem is that we tend to define God's goodness in light of weeks and months and years, rather than in the light of a lifetime and beyond.

I read a story, recently, about a Christian who had given up in despair, believing that God was not kind and good. Yes, a Christian who had given up on the kindness of God.

His name was David Flood. In 1921, he and his young wife, Svea, left Sweden for the heart of Africa. They were soon joined by another young missionary couple and, together, they decided on a remote village. When they arrived, however, the chief rejected them and would not let them enter his village for fear of displeasing the local gods. The two couples had no choice but to go up a hillside and, on a slope of land, build their own mud huts. They prayed for a spiritual breakthrough, but none came. Their only contact was a young boy, who was allowed to sell chickens and eggs to them twice a week. Svea Flood decided that, if this was the only African villager she could talk to, she would try to lead the boy to Christ. Soon, he did indeed accept the free gift of salvation through faith in Christ's death alone on the cross. Beyond that, there was no other encouragement.

In the meantime, malaria began to hunt them down. Soon the other couple decided they had had enough and left for another location nearby. David and Svea Flood were alone. In the midst of these trying times, Svea found herself pregnant and, when the time came, the village chief softened just enough to allow a midwife to help her. A little girl, Aina, was born. It was too much for Svea, however, as she was exhausted and weak from malaria. She lived only another seventeen days and died.

Something inside David Flood snapped. He dug a crude grave, buried his twenty-seven year old wife, and took his daughter down the mountain to the mission station. He handed her to the missionaries and snarled, "I'm going back to Sweden. I've lost my wife and I obviously can't take care of a baby. God is not good; He is not faithful; He has, in fact, ruined my life."

With that, he turned his back on his calling, and on God Himself.

Within eight months, the adoptive parents of Aina died of malaria. She was given to another missionary couple, who brought her to the United States and raised her. Aina, now known as Aggie, grew up in South Dakota. She attended North

Central Bible College, in Minneapolis, and married a man, named Dewey Hurst, who entered the ministry.

Years went by. Aggie knew nothing of her past, apart from her parents names, her own birth in Africa, and the death of her mother. She had never seen her father. She enjoyed, with her husband and family, a fruitful ministry. Dewey had become the president of a Bible college in Seattle, Washington.

Then, one day, a Swedish religious magazine appeared in her mailbox. She had no idea who had sent it, and, of course, she could not read the words. But, as she turned the pages, all of a sudden, a photo stopped her cold. There, in a jungle setting, was a grave with a white cross, and on the cross were the words, Svea Flood.

She rushed to the office of a college faculty member who could translate the magazine article. He summarized, "It was about missionaries who had come long ago . . . the birth of a baby . . . the death of the young mother . . . the one little African boy who had been led to Christ . . . how, after the missionaries had left, the boy had grown up and persuaded the chief to let him build a school . . . he won all his students to Christ . . . the children led their parents to Christ . . . the chief, himself, became a Christian . . . today there were six hundred believers in that one village."

All because of the sacrifice of David and Svea Flood.

For their twenty fifth wedding anniversary, the Bible college gave the Hursts a vacation in Sweden, where, among other things, Aggie could search for her father. It was not difficult to find his family. David Flood had remarried and had four children, but, in bitterness, had slowly wasted away and had only recently suffered a stroke.

After an emotional reunion with her half brothers and sister, Aggie brought up the subject of seeing her father. They replied, "You can talk to him, even though he's very ill, but you need to know that he's had one rule in his family, 'Never mention the name of God, because God is not good, He took everything away from me'."

Aggie was undeterred. She went in to his room and approached him. He was now seventy-three years old. He turned toward her and, immediately, began to cry, "Aina," he called her, "Aina, I didn't mean to give you away."

"It's all right, Papa," she replied, "God took care of me."

The old man instantly stiffened and the tears stopped. "God? God forgot all of us . . . God forgot us."

He turned away toward the wall. "Papa, I want to tell you a true story. You didn't go to Africa in vain. Mama didn't die in vain. The little boy you won to the Lord grew up to win that whole village to Jesus Christ. Today there are six hundred African people serving the Lord because you followed the call of God in your life. Papa, God had a plan all along . . . He didn't forget you."

He turned back from facing the wall, the tears returned, and he began to talk. By the end of that afternoon, the kindness of God had brought him back, not to the repentance that brings salvation, but to the repentance that brings restoration and fellowship.

Aggie and her husband, eventually, had to return to America. A few weeks later, David Flood went home to heaven.

A few years later, Aggie and her husband were attending an evangelism conference in London. A report was given from the nation of Zaire by the superintendent of the national church, representing 110,000 baptized believers. He spoke eloquently about the spread of the gospel in his country. Afterwards, Aggie could not help but go up and ask him if he had ever heard of David and Svea Flood. "Yes, madam," he replied, "as a little boy, I used to sell chickens and eggs to them twice a week. It was Svea Flood who led me to Christ."

They embraced for a long time. He then said, "You must come to Africa. Your mother is the most famous person in our church history."

In time, Aggie did come. She was welcomed by cheering throngs of villagers. Eventually she was taken to her mother's grave – with that white cross and the words, "Svea Flood," written there. She knelt in the soil to pray and give thanks to a good and patient and kind God. That national church leader read from scripture, "Those who sow in tears shall reap with songs of joy."⁴

. . . do you think lightly of the riches of [God's] kindness and forbearance and patience . . . ?

The world says, "Yes, we do not care for that."

But, the believer says, "Oh no. May I never think lightly or underestimate the riches of God's grace!"

And, he brushes every diamond off the shelf and reaches, as it were, for three oranges. The world

laughs at his values, but he grasps, in his hand, treasures that truly matter, as he takes his seat in the lifeboat and faces the churning dangerous storms of life. He holds, in his hands and in his heart, those three precious things – the patience, the forbearance, and the kindness of our good and faithful God.

¹ Charles R. Swindoll, The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart (Nashville, Word Publishing, 1998), p. 469

² William Barclay, The Letter to the Romans (Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1975), p. 42

³ Roy L. Laurin, Romans: Where Life Begins (Grand Rapids, Kregel Publications, 1988), p. 64

⁴ Jim Cymbala, Fresh Power (Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 2001), p. 115

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