

Churchianity

Got Religion? – Part II

Romans 2:19-24

Introduction

In the gospel of Mark, chapter 4, the Lord told a parable about the sowing of the gospel seed. He revealed four different kinds of reception to the gospel.

From an outward appearance, the soil looked the same, but, in one case, the soil was hard and the gospel could not penetrate.

In another case, the soil was filled with seed that would produce thorns and thistles to grow up with the grain and, eventually, choke it out.

In still another case, the seed went into shallow soil where the seed took root and sprang up. Everything looked good, but, under the surface of the soil, there were rocks that caused the roots to grow only so far down. Eventually, the roots ran out of nourishment and died.

So, you have the hardened heart, the crowded heart, and the insincere heart. All are hearts that did not open to the gospel, although they all treated the gospel somewhat differently. Some, as in the case of the insincere heart, seemed to accept it and believe it, but, ultimately, the appearance of good soil eroded, exposing unbelief and a hardened heart underneath.

I tend to think of the depth of the soil, in this parable, or the reality of good soil in terms of time. In other words, there are some who accept the seed of the gospel and seem to be good soil for six months, or even six years, before revealing the truth of their stony, unconverted hearts.

Sometimes the appearance of good soil is eroded through a tragedy or a crisis; such as, a turn of

financial events, a change in health, or a personal challenge to a way of life, and the person turns on their heels and leaves their walk with Christ and Christ's church. They, ultimately, reject the gospel and reveal their unconverted hearts.

Sometimes it happens soon after the person prays, what we call, the "sinner's prayer". It sounded real, it seemed genuine, but, over time, it was shown not to be true redemption.

I was talking to the pastor of a small South Carolina church recently. We were talking about this issue of good soil and the seed of truth. He said, "Stephen, I remember, years ago, meeting a man in my church who was respected by everyone. He always brought interesting questions and discussion to our Sunday school class, was involved in volunteer ministry, and had been, for ten years, one of the leading men in the church. Then, the Senior Pastor asked if I would begin to meet with the man and attempt to grow deeper together through an accountability partnership. I agreed. After three or four times together, I noticed that the man never brought his Bible, never really had anything to say about a personal walk with Christ, and never made any reference to spiritual fruit or a passion for Christ. Finally, one morning, he looked me in the eye and said, 'Listen, to be absolutely honest with you, I'm not really sure in my heart of hearts that God even exists.'"

Ten years in the church! The soil eroded after years of seemingly being receptive.

I personally have had that experience more times than I ever wanted. I can remember, years ago,

praying with a man to receive Christ. We began a discipleship time together and finished after several months. A year or so later, he divorced his wife and began living with another woman. When challenged about his lifestyle and the contradiction that it was to the Bible, he said he did not really know if he believed all that stuff in the Bible anyway. Two years in the church! The soil washed away, revealing an unconverted heart.

I remember, as a college student, walking downtown. I met a man, who was obviously down and out, and he asked if I had any money. "College student" and "having money" were never in the same sentence! I said, "No."

He did not believe me and pressed for money. I said to him, "Listen, I could give you money, but you would spend it and we would both be poorer than we are now. I do have something that lasts forever, however. Are you interested in hearing about it?"

He said, "Yea, what is it?"

I began to share the gospel with this man. He listened intently, answering my questions, and following my presentation. I could see his face soften and, eventually, his eyes filled with tears. I asked him, "Would you like to pray, confess your sin to Christ, and ask Him to forgive you and save you?"

He said, with tears coming down his cheeks, "Yes I would."

I said, "Would you be willing to kneel right here on the sidewalk with me and pray?"

People were walking by, but he said, "Yes!"

We knelt together on the sidewalk and I led him in a prayer for salvation. We got up, hugged, and he said, "Do you have any money?"

I said, "I was really telling you the truth when I said I didn't have any, but I know where there is a rescue mission that will feed and house you."

He said, "You mean you won't give me any money?"

I said, "I don't have any."

He unleashed a stream of curse words upon my ears that shocked me to no end. With anger and hatred, he used God's name in vain and stomped off down the street.

It might not be that dramatic, but I believe this city and county and country is filled with people who have prayed the sinner's prayer, but do not live a sanctified life. I still meet them all the time – "Yea, I've prayed that prayer. Yea, I used to believe in

Jesus. Yea, I used to go to church, when I was kid, and even got baptized. Today? Na, I don't have any use for it."

They had ten years, or two years, or five minutes of good soil, but it ran out and revealed that, all along, their hearts were unreceptive. They had only prayed the sinner's prayer for the benefit of a salved conscience; they had prayed for salvation so they could add God to their list of insurance – flood insurance, fire insurance, disability insurance, auto insurance, medical insurance, and eternal insurance.

Many of them still go to church, but, if you look under the surface, you discover that church, for them, is a place to pass around business cards; a place to meet new clients; a way to enhance their reputation. Spiritual activity is simply a way of self-promotion. Even prayer is an exercise of selfishness to get what they want, when they want it, from God.

They have "churchianity," but not Christianity.

They are people who say, even to this day, "God bless you," with their lips, but God has nothing to do with their lives. They have no desire for the Word of God, or the character of God, or the will of God.

The apostle John was asked about those who had left the fellowship of believers and walked away from their faith. Were they truly saved? John, under inspiration, answered, in I John, chapter 2, verse 19,

They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us.

Eventually, the reality of true Christianity or mere "churchianity" was revealed. It was just a matter of time before the reality of Christianity or the facade of "churchianity" became known.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is a vast difference between "churchianity" and Christianity. A churchman and a Christian are two entirely different races. One is religious, the other is redeemed. Both are sincere, but only one is saved. Both of them have a form of religious exercise, but only one of them has truly been redeemed.

The apostle John wrote, in I John, chapter 2, verses 4 through 6,

The one who says, "I have come to know [Christ]," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love God has truly been perfected. By

this we know that we are in Him; the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

In chapter 1, verse 6, he wrote,

If we say that we have fellowship with [Christ] and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth

Paul warned Titus when he wrote, in Titus, chapter 1, verse 10 and verse 16,

For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers . . . They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deed.

The important distinction between that which is genuine and that which is false is the bearing of fruit. In Mark's account, the Lord made clear that spiritual reproduction and spiritual fruit bearing were the things that revealed spiritual life. That is, life that measures up to the lips; a walk that matches the talk.

This happens to be Paul's primary issue with the faithful Jew. Just as the immoral man is condemned in Romans, chapter 1; just as the moral man is condemned in chapter 2; so also the religious man and, with him, the shallow systems of religion stand condemned.

The only thing the religions of the world do is whitewash gravestones. They are experts at putting make-up on a corpse. They sound holy and look sanctified; they appear to be alive and to be able to give life, but underneath, there is only death.

There was no one more religious, in Paul's day, than the faithful Jew – and they knew it. They thought that if anyone would gain the pleasure of God and the safety of paradise, it would be them.

There are thousands, if not millions, of Americans who, today, feel they are safe before God. Why? Because they claim the name Christian; because of their dedication to the Law; because of their respect for God; because of their special knowledge and insight into God's will, and because they have a basic understanding of the major stories in the Bible. They know about Noah, they have heard about Elijah, and they believe in a future heaven and a future hell. They know the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament and they can quote John, chapter 3, verse 16.

However, as we will see today, the profession of the faithful Jew had nothing to do with his practice. Their creed did not impact their conduct. What they

recited with their lips had nothing to do with what they did with their lives.

Six Reasons Why the Faithful Jew (Religious Man) Felt Eternally Safe Before God

Paul gave us six reasons why the faithful Jew, or religious man, felt eternally safe before God. It begins with verse 17 of Romans, chapter 2.

Because of his special name

1. The faithful Jew felt safe because of his special name. Look at verse 17a.

. . . you bear the name "Jew" . . .

Because of his dedication to the Law

2. The faithful Jew felt safe because of his dedication to the Law. Continue in verse 17.

. . . and rely upon the Law . . .

Because of his respect for God

3. The faithful Jew felt safe because of his respect for God. Look at the end of verse 17.

. . . and boast in God

Because of his special knowledge

4. The faithful Jew felt safe because of his special knowledge. Continue to verse 18a.

and know His will . . .

Because of his keen insight

5. The faithful Jew felt safe because of his keen insight into what was essential. Look at the middle of verse 18.

. . . and approve the things that are essential . . .

Because of his biblical education

6. The faithful Jew felt safe because of his biblical education. Look at the last part of verse 18.

. . . being instructed out of the Law

"Instructed," is the Greek word "katecheo," from which we get the transliterated word "catechism". In

other words, this is saying, “. . . being catechized out of the scriptures”.

The faithful Jew felt safe before God because of all these reasons – just as many religious people, today, who fill the pews of our churches, feel safe for the same reasons. They know the creeds, they know the verses, they know the Law, they know the name of the one and only true and living God. They are sincerely religious and, at the same time, they are on their way to hell.

Now, the guilt of the faithful Jew was compounded further by what Paul reveals next.

Four Reasons Why the Faithful Jew (Religious Man) Felt Superior Before Men

In Romans, chapter 2, Paul has revealed six reasons why the faithful Jew felt eternally safe before God. Now, beginning in verse 19, he will reveal four reasons why the faithful Jew, or religious man, felt entirely superior before men.

Because he considered himself to be the spiritual supervisor

1. The first reason the faithful Jew felt superior was because he considered himself to be the spiritual supervisor. Look at verse 19a.

and [you] are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind . . .

In other words, “What would God do without us? We are indispensable to humanity. These poor Gentile dogs will never make it anywhere without our leadership – they will miss the path.”

Jesus Christ would tell the Jewish leaders that they were, in fact, blind themselves. Their eyes were closed to the truth of the gospel.

In Matthew, chapter 15, verse 14, Jesus said of the religious leaders,

. . . they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit.

In Matthew, chapter 23, the Lord, again, said to the Pharisees, in verse 16a,

Woe to you, blind guides . . .

in verse 17a,

You fools and blind men . . .

in verse 19a,

You blind men . . .

and in verse 26,

You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.

By the way, Paul says the same thing about the religions of this world, when he writes, in II Corinthians, chapter 4, verse 4,

. . . the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Because he considered himself to be the source of enlightenment

2. What irony then, that the Jew would consider himself superior before men, because, secondly, he considered himself to be the source of enlightenment. Look again at verse 19 of Romans, chapter 2.

and [you] are confident that you yourself are . . . a light to those who are in darkness

It was true that through the Jewish nation, God gave the world the prophets, the book of Songs or Psalms, and He gave the Messiah, born of a Jewish virgin girl. Through the nation, God had promised, in Isaiah, chapter 42, verse 6, that the world would be given “a light”.

Yet, the nation had rejected the Messiah, the One who rightfully claimed to be “the light of the world”. And the world today, who rejects Jesus Christ, have condemned themselves to walk in darkness – even though they claim to be enlightened.

Because he considered himself to be the standard of morality

3. The third reason the faithful Jew felt superior was because he considered himself to be the standard of morality. Look at verse 20a.

[you are confident that you are] a corrector of the foolish . . .

The word “corrector” has within it the idea of being one who draws the boundaries. I was on our church grounds recently, dropping off two of my children who were going to help with an outreach soccer tournament. For a few minutes, I watched one of the guys push the little contraption that lays down

the chalk and draws the boundaries of the field in straight white lines. The game has to be played within those lines and anything outside those lines is out of bounds. The referee will be the one who blows his whistle, when the ball goes out of bounds, and to determine who gets the throw-in.

The faithful Jew said, “I am the one who blows the whistle when anyone goes out of bounds; when anyone crosses the line. I will be the referee in everyone’s life.”

Because he considered himself to be the spring of wisdom

4. The fourth reason the faithful Jew felt superior was because he considered himself to be the spring of wisdom. Continue to verse 20b.

[you are confident that you are] a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth

The word “immature” refers to the Gentile who has converted to Judaism. We refer to them as a Gentile proselyte or a God fearer. This is someone who has left their pagan idolatry and begun to follow the true God of Israel.

They needed teaching. They did not know anything about the Torah – the Law of God. The trouble was, the religious leaders were teaching them traditions as doctrine and introducing them to ritual instead of a true relationship with a holy and loving God.

The Gentile proselyte was worse off than before.

Jesus Christ said that very thing when He said, in Matthew, chapter 23, verse 15,

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel about on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.

How many people in this country today, consider themselves to be superior to the rest of the world because they know the truth about the Bible, they know the Law of God, they teach a Sunday school class, they are concerned over the waywardness of the world, they know the standards of morality – but, in fact, do not know God?

They are religious, but unredeemed.

Five Rhetorical Questions That Confronted the Faithful Jew (Religious Man) With His Utter Sinfulness Before God

You might say, “How do I know if I’ve been deceived? How can I examine my faith to see if I am truly redeemed?”

In the next few verses, the apostle Paul takes the broom of scripture and brushes away, what seems to be, good soil, and reveals, underneath, the rocky soil of unbelief. Paul provides five questions for them, and for us today, that confront our sense of safety and superiority. These are five questions that reveal the reality of good soil and good seed that bears good fruit, or the utter lack thereof.

Do you not teach yourself?

1. The first question asks, “You, who teach another, do you not teach yourself?” In other words, the faithful Jew knew the truth and taught the truth of the Law, but had not applied the truth to his own life. Look at verse 21a.

you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? . . .

Their religious creed does not produce righteous conduct. What they say they believe never affects how they behave.

Now Paul expected his audience to say something like, “What do you mean we don’t apply the Law? Haven’t you been watching us? We wash our hands ceremonially before we eat; we refrain from working on the Sabbath; we never miss a sacrifice or a religious festival; we fast and pray and give money to the poor. What do you mean we don’t apply the truth to our own lives?”

Do you steal?

2. So Paul says, in effect, “Well, now that you’ve asked for specifics . . .”. Continue to verse 21b for the second rhetorical question.

. . . You who preach that one should not steal, do you steal?

Notice, Paul is not saying outright, “You’re a thief.”

Instead, he is asking rhetorical questions, and expecting their consciences to be provoked. “Do you steal?!”

Jesus had already condemned them for turning his Father’s house into a den of thieves, when it was supposed to be a house of prayer.

Do you claim to know Christ and claim the name of Christian and do you, at the same time, steal?!

An article in the *Washington Post* was headlined, “Computer Cheating on the Rise”. It read,

Isn’t cheating taking information that doesn’t belong to you and attaching your name to it? George Mason University instructor Anne Marchant calls them “patchwork plagiarists,” for students who copy and paste together passages from various articles they have found on the Internet and then turn in the work as their own. She has even caught students doing this in her computer ethics course. Teachers and administrators at several colleges agree that cheating is on the rise because the computer has made it easy. “In the olden days, a student had to go to the library, dig up the information and retype it,” said Leon Geyer, a Virginia Tech professor, “now you can sit in your dorm room and just reach out, point and click.”

What about the work-a-day world of business? According to a study by the American Management Association, United States businesses annually lose over ten billion dollars to employee pilferage. This includes everything from staples to software products to falsified business expense reports, etc. Over four billion dollars are lost annually to embezzlement, over two and a half billion dollars to burglary, over two billion dollars to shoplifting, over one and a third billion dollars to arson, and over five hundred thousand dollars per incident of computer fraud.

What is the distinction between a religious person and a true believer? Paul seems to believe, and he wrote under the influence of the Holy Spirit, so God seems to believe that honesty is one of them. An unbeliever may tell a lie to have his way; a believer will tell the truth, even if it means he does not get his way.

So, the religious man, first, has not applied the truth to his own life, and, secondly, has not developed the quality of honesty.

Do you commit adultery?

3. Thirdly, the merely religious man will talk about how sexual sin is wrong, but will not have purified his own heart. Paul goes on, in verse 22a, to ask,

You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? . . .

Do you commit adultery?

Paul wrote this to the Ephesian believers, in chapter 4, verses 17 through 22.

This I say therefore, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit

In other words, one of the chief characteristics of the unbelieving world is its utter abandonment to sexual license and sexual fulfillment. The world revolves around sensuality and the physical. You have seen it and probably, like me, have become desensitized to the fact that everything, from automobiles to soft drinks, is sold by first attracting people to some form of sensual or sexual benefit.

The Bible calls sexual relations involving a married individual with someone other than their spouse, “adultery”. It does not call it a fling, nor a passing affair, nor a self-fulfilling relationship, but adultery. It also calls sexual sin between two people who are unmarried, “fornication”. It does not call it experimentation, nor the right of passage for young people, nor something that is okay if you love each other, but fornication.

J. Allen Peterson, in his book, entitled, *The Myth of the Greener Grass*, wrote,

A call for sexual integrity and fidelity is like a solitary voice crying in today’s wilderness. What once carried a stigma of guilt and embarrassment, is now called an affair, a nice sounding, almost inviting word, wrapped in

mystery, fascination and excitement. What was once behind the scenes is now in the headlines, is now a movie theme, is now a best seller, it has now become as common as the cold.

If the religious leaders had said to Paul, “We’ve never committed the act,” he would have reminded them that Jesus Christ said, as recorded in Matthew, chapter 5, verse 28,

everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart.

In other words, He suggests that there is a line that you cross between a simple look and the fantasy of the heart to sin.

One author wrote,

We could define the line between temptation which is not sin, and lust which is sin, this way; lust is the desire that conceives a plan to possess. When a look turns into desire you have crossed the line. Adultery in the heart is lust that mentally engages in fantasy; adultery in the flesh is lust that carries out the fantasy.

In Romans, chapter 2, Paul is basically asking the respectable, faithful Jewish people and leaders of his day, “Have you committed the sin of lusting and scheming about sexual relations with someone other than your spouse? Have you even taken the steps to actually committing the act?”

It is a question that needs to be asked in this century as much as in the first century. Two thousand years have not changed the heart of man. Today, the same statistics of immorality exist as much within the church as outside the church.

So, in terms of evaluating true conversion against spiritual deception, one of the greatest evidences of true conversion is a passion for a pure heart and a passion for a pure life.

Do you rob temples?

4. Fourthly, Paul goes on to ask, in the last part of verse 22,

. . . You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?

In other words, the faithful Jew had not chosen God over money.

This is a difficult expression to understand. There are a number of interpretations and none of them are very satisfying.

I personally believe that insight into what Paul meant is provided by two things.

- The first is a verse from Deuteronomy, chapter 7, verse 25, where God warned the Israelite about the gold and silver gods made by the idolatrous nations around them. God commanded,

The graven images of their gods you are to burn with fire; you shall not covet the silver or the gold that is on them, nor take it for yourselves, lest you be snared by it, for it is an abomination to the Lord your God.

In other words, while the Israelite would never think of bowing down to the images of golden gods, they would love to get their hands on the gold. But to touch the idol was, according to the Law, a defiling act, so they were to keep their hands off the idols.

- The second thing that gives insight is a comment made by Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, who wrote,

Let no one blaspheme those gods which other cities esteem such; nor may any one steal what belongs to strange temples, nor take away the gifts that are dedicated to any god.ⁱⁱ

What was happening, I believe, was twofold. First, the Jewish people were using idols for material purposes – possibly melting down the gods and using the gold and silver for their own bank accounts, even though it defiled them. Secondly, they were trafficking in stolen goods from pagan temples – stealing things offered to idols and marketing them in the Jewish community for their own business advancement.

It was an issue of commerce over character. In the final analysis, money was more important than God.

One of the marks of the unbeliever is that whenever the choice has to be made – money or God; business or faith; career or character – money, business, and career will always win the contest. Commerce, greed, and materialism are the true marks of the unbeliever’s unconverted, selfish heart.

Take a look at your checkbook. How much have you given to Christ and His worldwide mission? How much have you kept for yourself? Paul says, in effect, your checkbook register is one of the most revealing characteristics that distinguishes between the religious and the redeemed.

I learned, last week, that we have a little more than 1,700 households in our church directory; more than 1,700 households regularly attend our church. Yet, the administration office informs me that more than 250 households have no tax receipt sent to them because there is no record of them ever giving anything. Another 250 households are on record of giving five dollars or less a month. I do not know who those households are, so you do not need to duck your head, just know the statistic – 500 households out of 1,700, or thirty percent, have not caught on.

Now, I am not saying this because I am worried about meeting the budget! Those who serve with me and know me well, know that is the last thing I will ever lose sleep over. What does keep me awake, at times, is not the budget, but whether or not our church is occupied by true believers. Could it be that thirty percent of our church is unredeemed?! I ask that based on that one rhetorical question alone, not to mention the others about applying scripture to life, dishonesty, and sexual immorality.

My friend, how would you answer these questions? You and God alone know the answer.

Your answers may be a revelation that your soil is only about an inch deep. They may show that, some day, that good looking, religious soil will erode away, revealing the underlying unbelief – and you will walk away from the faith you say you have.

Perhaps this will occur on the heels of some crisis; some confrontation; some crossroads; some decision; some difficulty or trial, and you will turn

your back on God and openly walk away from any appearance of a relationship with Christ. You will reveal to the world that you too were once involved in “churchianity,” but not Christianity; you were religious, but unredeemed and on the road that leads to hell.

“Stephen, are you trying to get me to question the sincerity of my faith?”

“Yes!”

“Are you trying to get me to question the reality of my salvation?”

“Yes!”

“Are you trying to arouse my conscience and reveal the potential for self-deception?”

“Yes!”

The apostle Paul said, in II Corinthians, chapter 13, verse 5, that we should,

Test [ourselves] to see if [we] are in the faith; examine [ourselves]! . . .

That is exactly what he is doing in Romans, chapter 2, to the religious world of his day. He is challenging them to answer the most important question they will ever be asked.

Are you living a lie – or are you truly alive? Are you religious – or are you truly redeemed?

The fifth question we will save for our next discussion.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 10/21/2001 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ “Computer Cheating on the Rise,” Washington Post (Oct. 11, 1998)

ⁱⁱ Josephus Flavius, “The Antiquities of the Jews Book 4,” in The Works of Josephus, (Peabody, Mass., Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1987), p. 117.