

The Moralistic Mind Small Group Guide

Warm-up Question: (Choose one, make up your own, or skip this part all together, depending upon the nature of your group.)

1. Were you more of a “color in the lines” or “color outside of the lines” child?
2. How consistent is the time you go to bed every night?

Read the following passage: Read Romans 2:17-24; 7:14-25.

In Romans 2:17-24, the apostle Paul is addressing an imaginary Jewish dialogue partner. Just as he argued that all Gentiles are under the power of sin in Romans 1 (an argument a Jewish reader would wholly agree with), Paul now argues that Jews are also under the power of sin and in need of the salvation that Jesus Christ offers to all human beings. In this passage Paul describes the Jewish person’s proud commitment to the Law of Moses, a commitment which, Paul argues in several places, still does not free an individual from the power of sin. Knowledge of the Law is not enough.

In Romans 7, Paul describes the internal struggle that results in the Jewish person’s mind as he finds himself fiercely committed to the Law, and yet unable to keep it. Although Paul probably uses the pronoun “I” to represent any (and every) Jewish person under the Law, he could look back on his own life and see how the Law left him in need of the salvation that God offers through Jesus Christ.

Paul was trained as a Pharisee. The Pharisees were the most religiously devoted Israelites in the first century. They were scrupulously committed to upholding every detail of the Law of Moses. But Jesus’ ministry revealed that these Pharisees, though outwardly zealous, were often far from God in their hearts. They suffered from what we might describe as a “moralistic mind.”

Questions for Discussion (Choose several that are relevant for your group):

1. Read Matthew 23:5-7. Why do you think the moralistic mind is so often committed to image? What are some of the ways this can emerge in the church? What might help us take off the masks that we often present to others? Is there anyone in your life that you can be vulnerable with?
2. Read Luke 18:9-14. Describe the mindset of the Pharisee in the Jesus’ parable. Why do you think the moralistic mind often looks on others with disdain? How can we tell if we are overly critical people? How does a critical spirit impact our relationships?
3. Read Matthew 9:10-13. What does Jesus say should replace our criticism? Can we show mercy and still uphold a standard for right behavior (in our homes, in our workplaces, etc.)? Explain. How do you define mercy?
4. The moralistic mind, though committed to a pristine image, often finds a way to justify evil behavior. This emerges most dramatically in the religious leaders’ plot to kill

Jesus. What can we do to fight against hypocrisy in our own lives? In what areas are you most prone to cover up your own sin?

5. The moralistic mind tends to oscillate between pride and self-loathing. (Compare the attitudes in Romans 2:17ff and Romans 7:14ff.) Why do you think this is the case? Do you think you are too hard on yourself?
6. The Pharisees equated the voice of God with their system of laws and rewards and punishments, and this hindered their ability to hear God's voice in the words of Jesus. How can a moralistic mindset affect our ability to hear from God?
7. Clearly sin and obedience are very important matters in the Scriptures. How can we uphold the seriousness of these subjects without slipping into the moralistic mindset exemplified by the Pharisees?
8. How does the grace of God set us free from a moralistic mindset?
9. Read Ephesians 2:1-10. Explain what it means to be saved by God's grace. What is the relationship between God's grace and our works?
10. How can you put more emphasis on God's grace in your life this week?

Pray