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Excuses, Excuses

Romans 2

Series: The Pure Gospel

Rev. Andrew Hawkins, Ph.D.

The Village Church

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I. Introduction

- A. The past ten years
 - 1. Pastor at TVC
 - 2. Primary purpose – teach the Word of God
- B. Before that
 - 1. 30 plus years as a professor at WVU
 - 2. Primary purpose was to teach people how to teach
 - 3. During that time the Lord led us into ministry
 - a. So for much of that time, I spent much time teaching the Word of God in the context of the church
- C. Before that
 - 1. In school
 - a. Undergraduate and graduate school
 - b. Primary purpose was to prepare to do what I would do for the next 30 years
 - c. High school – primary purpose was to figure out what I would do for the rest of my life
- D. Before that
 - 1. My primary purpose was to drive my mother crazy
 - 2. I don't know that I succeeded in driving my mother crazy
 - a. I think I got pretty close on occasion
 - 3. But one of the things that characterized our relationship was the “discussions” we had
 - a. Some would call them arguments
 - 4. They were often infuriating for my mother
 - a. Because they led her to believe that I would not become a teacher
 - b. But I would become a lawyer
 - 5. A lawyer because I seemed to have an argument for pretty much everything
 - 6. And not just any lawyer
 - a. A defense lawyer to be exact
 - b. Because whenever there was an issue to be prosecuted – and there were plenty
 - c. Plenty of things I had done wrong
 - d. I always had an excuse

- e. Some reason I was not responsible
 - f. Some basis for which I ought to be acquitted
- E. All of this happened pretty much before I became a Christian when I was a teenager
 - 1. Since then God began His work of sanctification
 - a. And of course, as for most of us, it has been a work in progress
 - 2. He has made me less argumentative
 - a. Some of you might say, not enough!
 - b. Jean might say, not enough!
 - 3. But if you knew what I was like back then, and what a pain in the neck I was to my parents, you would thank God that there has been some progress!
- F. Bottom line in all of this
 - 1. I learned that I shared in what is one of the key features of human nature
 - a. Our nearly limitless capacity for excuse-making
 - 2. I may have been pretty good at some things
 - a. But I was really good at excuse-making
- G. In the e-Connections this week I gave this human propensity a Latin name
 - 1. **Homo excusationem factorem**
 - a. **Man the excuse maker**

II. **Reacting to Bad News**

- A. Series – **The Pure Gospel**: Study of the Book of Romans
- B. Paul's thought so far
 - 1. Begins to introduce gospel – 1:16-17
 - a. **Romans 1:16-17** (ESV) — 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."
 - 2. Interlude – Paul establishes the need for the gospel
 - a. Concludes in 3:21-22 – parallel verses to 1:16-17
 - 3. Interlude establishes the sinfulness of humanity
- C. **Romans 1:18-32** – downward spiral of sin
 - 1. Human suppression of truth about God as revealed in nature
 - 2. Refusal to glorify God and give thanks to Him
 - 3. Judgment – God gave them up to additional sin
 - a. Judges them by letting them do what they want
 - b. In lusts of their hearts to impurity
 - c. Dishonorable passions – substituting unnatural for natural functions
 - d. Debased mind – they think what is good is evil and vice versa
 - 4. All kinds of specific sins listed
 - a. Idolatry
 - b. Sexual immorality – including homosexuality

- c. Unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice
 - d. Envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness
 - e. Gossip, slander, God-hating, insolent, haughty, boastful, evil-inventing, disobedience to parents
 - f. Foolishness, faithlessness, heartlessness, ruthlessness
 - g. And approval of evil
- D. Reaction of vast majority of people
 - 1. Start to act like I did with my mother!
 - a. I didn't do that!
 - b. But if I did (now I'm not saying that I did); but if I did, I had a good reason to do it!
 - 2. But we're not like that!
 - 3. We're civilized
 - 4. Sexually appropriate
 - a. Married, not adulterers
 - b. Not homosexuals
 - 5. Not idolatrous
 - 6. Not greedy, or evil, or envious
 - 7. Haven't murdered anyone
 - 8. Don't hate people; we do love people; we give to the poor
 - 9. We certainly don't hate God; we go to church or synagogue
- E. Chapter 2 is Paul's response to that reaction
 - 1. Debate about Chapter 2 among scholars
 - a. Moral Gentiles or Jews?
 - b. Some see Gentiles in vv 1-16; Jews in vv 17-29
 - c. Others see Jews in the whole chapter
 - 2. Doesn't matter – if the shoe fits...
 - a. It will fit Jews and Gentiles depending on which excuse each decides to use
 - 3. Deals with those excuses
 - a. Those who say, "We're not like those pagan sinners"
 - 4. Excuses
 - a. The moral excuse – "We're good"
 - b. The religious excuse – "We have a special relationship with God"

III. The Moral Excuse – We're good!

- A. Self-condemnation
 - 1. Romans 2:1–3 (ESV) —
 - 2. 1 Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things.
 - 3. 2 We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things.
 - 4. 3 Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God?

5. Remarkable way Paul deals with this objection
 - a. Doesn't allow the "moral" person to get away with his supposed goodness
 - b. Then tell him he hasn't fulfilled God's higher standards
 - c. He says, instead, we'll take the very judgments you hold against others, and we'll hold those standards up to you
 - d. Even by your own standards, which are lower than God's
 - e. You'll be found wanting
 - f. You can't even measure up to your own standards
 - g. You condemn yourselves

B. **Presumption on patience**

1. **Romans 2:4** (ESV) —
 - a. 4 Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?
2. One of the most profound misunderstandings of human beings is how we regard the patience of God
 - a. Most people get along pretty well; believe they're blessed by God
 - b. They assume that their great blessings are because they've earned them by being pretty good, at least good enough
3. Jesus, speaking of Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices
 - a. **Luke 13:2-5** (ESV) — 2 And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? 3 No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. 4 Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? 5 No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."
4. Boice: Jesus' point [in Lk 13:2-5] was that our way of asking that question is entirely wrong. The question is not why God somehow "lets down" and allows others to perish, but rather why he has spared us, we being the sinners we are. If we could understand how sinful we are, we could understand that the soldiers should have killed us, or the tower should have fallen on us. We should be dead in hell this very instant. That we are not in hell is an evidence of God's tolerance. He has not yet confined us to the punishment we deserve. God's tolerance should lead us to repentance, before it is too late.
5. Boice: The reason why we do not think often of God's tolerance and patience is our insensitivity to sin and our reluctance to turn from it.
6. Pink: How wondrous is God's patience with the world today. On every side people are sinning with a high hand. The divine law is trampled under foot and God himself openly despised. It is truly amazing that he does not instantly strike dead those who so brazenly defy him.

C. **Storing up wrath**

1. **Romans 2:5–11** (ESV) —
 - a. 5 But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.
 - b. 6 He will render to each one according to his works:
 - c. 7 to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life;
 - d. 8 but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.
 - e. 9 There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek,
 - f. 10 but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek.
 - g. 11 For God shows no partiality.
2. Remarkable thing about Paul's argument – the very people who regard themselves as good, moral people, are, by their very moral actions, actually storing up wrath against themselves
 - a. Expect that they're storing up all kinds of perqs – it's just the opposite
3. Boice: I think of this man as storing up a great horde of gold coins, placing them in an attic above his bed where he thinks no one will find them and where they will be safe. He keeps this up for years, amassing a great weight of gold. But one day, while he is sleeping and oblivious to his danger, this great weight of gold breaks through the ceiling of his bedroom, comes crashing down onto his bed, and kills him. He thought of his wealth as salvation, but it was death.
4. Paul then lays out two courses, one leading to judgment, the other to salvation
 - a. Persevering in doing good – glory, honor, immortality – eternal life
 - b. Glory, honor and peace will be the result of doing good
 - c. Self-seeking – disobedience – unrighteousness – wrath and indignation
 - d. Tribulation and distress will be the result of doing evil
5. Is Paul laying out a path to salvation based on works?
 - a. Yes!
 - b. If you persevere in doing good, seek glory, honor, immortality, you'll receive eternal life!
6. Doesn't that contradict the gospel?
 - a. No!
 - b. I said, if you did it, you'd get eternal life
 - c. I didn't say that you could do it
 - d. How many people have done it?
 - e. None
 - f. That's the point Paul ultimately comes to in 3:9-12
7. Paul's argument regarding good works establishes the gospel

- a. Gospel concerning Jesus Christ
- b. Jesus did persevere in doing good, seeking glory, honor and immortality
- c. He's the only one who did
- d. That's why faith in His works is the only way we can experience eternal life
- e. In that sense, salvation is by works – not ours, but Christ's

D. **The work of the law**

- 1. **Romans 2:12–16** (ESV) —
 - a. 12 For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.
 - b. 13 For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.
 - c. 14 For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law.
 - d. 15 They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them
 - e. 16 on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.
- 2. Ultimately, a law will judge everyone
 - a. There is the explicit Law given to the Jews
 - b. Which the Jews were so proud of!!!
- 3. But even for those who are not Jews – even for Gentiles, who do not have the Law of God – there is an implicit Law in everyone's heart
 - a. The “work of the law” is on the heart of the Gentile
 - b. They have an implicit sense of right and wrong
- 4. Whatever law it is, that law will destroy the excuse of the one who claims to be a good, moral person

E. So the moral excuse is, “No, we're not like that – we're good!”

- 1. Paul says no
- 2. You are self-condemned
 - a. You judge others, and by your own judgment of others, you stand judged
- 3. Not only that – you presume on the patience of God
 - a. God is patient, desiring that you come to your senses and repent of your sin
- 4. And because of that, you are storing up wrath
 - a. You think you're storing up assets
 - b. But instead you are accumulating liabilities
 - c. Which will eventually bury you
- 5. And finally, you're condemned by the law

- a. As a Jew – the Law of God given through Moses; passed down through the generations
- b. But even for you Gentiles – you have the residue of moral motions in your own hearts
- c. You know right from wrong
- d. And your own implicit, internal heart will condemn you
- 6. The moral excuse fails

IV. The Religious Excuse – We have a special relationship with God

A. Religious privilege

- 1. Romans 2:17a (ESV) — 17 But if you call yourself a Jew ...
- 2. Jews claimed this special relationship to God
- 3. Could also be Christians
 - a. Church-goers
 - b. Those who claim to have some special relationship to God based on religious practices
- 4. The excuse of the orthodox
 - a. Believe the right doctrine
 - b. Attend a good church
 - c. Member of that church
 - d. Take the sacraments or ordinances
 - e. Give tithes and offerings
- 5. You trust in those things and you're in trouble
 - a. The fact that you're in a church doesn't make you a believer
 - b. Any more than being in a garage makes you a car
- 6. The religious privilege doesn't hold up

B. The Law's accountability

- 1. Romans 2:17–20 (ESV) —
 - a. 17 But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God
 - b. 18 and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law;
 - c. 19 and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,
 - d. 20 an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth—
- 2. These are a list of religious things that were peculiar to Jews as the chosen people of God
 - a. Law
 - b. Boast in God
 - c. Know God's will
- 3. List of privileges of religious people
 - a. Guide to the blind
 - b. Light to those in darkness
 - c. Instructor of foolish

- d. Teacher of children
- 4. Not only being a religious person
 - a. But doing religious things
 - b. Enjoying religious privileges
 - c. Will not get you in a right relationship with God
- 5. **Romans 2:21–24** (ESV) —
 - a. 21 you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal?
 - b. 22 You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?
 - c. 23 You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law.
 - d. 24 For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”
- 6. Here the religious person is held accountable to the religious principles he espouses
 - a. Just as the moral person was held accountable to the moral principles he used to judge others
- 7. In this case it is the law of God
 - a. Jew – 10 commandments
 - b. Christian – Sermon on the Mount, or the Golden Rule
- 8. In any case, the Law will condemn them
- 9. **10 commandments**
 - a. Boice: We should not think that we have kept this commandment [against stealing] just because we have not forced our way into another person’s home and walked off with his possessions. We steal from God when we fail to worship him as we ought or when we set our own concerns ahead of his. We steal from an employer when we do not give the best work of which we are capable or when we overextend our coffee breaks or leave work early. We steal if we waste company products or use company time for personal matters. We steal if we sell something for more than it is worth. We steal from our employees if the work environment for which we are responsible harms their health, or if we do not pay them enough to guarantee a healthy, adequate standard of living. We steal when we borrow something and do not return it. We steal from ourselves when we waste our talents, time, or money.
- 10. **Sermon on the Mount**
 - a. Boice: Most “moral” people see themselves in this description [i.e., the Sermon on the Mount]. They think themselves meek, merciful, pure, peacemakers. They imagine that they actually thirst for righteousness and are even sometimes persecuted because of it. But who really embodies these characteristics? It is anyone you know? Hardly! The only person who has ever really embodied them is the one who spoke them: Jesus of Nazareth. He was gentle in spirit; he

mourned for sin; he was meek, merciful, and pure; he alone embodied righteousness – and he suffered for it.

11. **Golden Rule**

- a. Boice: Is that [i.e., the Golden Rule] the part by which you judge others and by which you want to be judged? Have you always treated others exactly as you have wanted them to treat you? Have you never been impatient with them? Never gotten angry with them unjustly? Never accused them falsely? Never taken advantage of another's weakness? The Golden Rule accuses you, as it must if it is truly the summation of the law, as Jesus teaches.

C. **A Worthless covenant**

- 1. One more card the Jew has to play
 - a. What about circumcision? That covenant sign
 - b. Christians – baptism
 - 2. **Romans 2:25–29** (ESV) —
 - a. 25 For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision.
 - b. 26 So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?
 - c. 27 Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law.
 - d. 28 For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical.
 - e. 29 But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.
 - 3. The sign of the covenant is worthless if you don't practice the covenant
 - 4. The sign is only a physical representation of an inward, spiritual transformation
 - a. Circumcision is of the heart
 - b. Baptism is by the Spirit
 - 5. When Paul uses that argument, he redefines the very nature of religion
 - a. As he redefines the very nature of Jewishness
 - 6. Boice: Paul does not say (since he is dealing with salvation matters) that one does not have to be a Jew to be saved, but rather that one has to be a *true* Jew which, as he points out, is not a matter of external criteria – such as possession of the law, descent from Abraham, or circumcision – but of conduct, which flows from spiritual changes within.
- D. The most significant religious practice won't save anyone
- 1. Without the corresponding change in the heart which that religious practices signifies
 - a. Whether Circumcision
 - b. Or Baptism
 - c. Or even the Lord's Supper

2. Religious excuses fail, just like the moral excuses fail
 - a. Religious privileges get you nowhere
 - b. The Law holds you accountable – whether Moses or Jesus
 - c. And even the covenant is worthless if it doesn't flow from inward transformation
- E. Excuses, excuses
 1. Moral
 2. Religious
 3. Both are dead ends

V. **Demolishing Excuses – Preach the Law!**

- A. **The Missing Link**
 1. Paul's primary purpose is to preach the gospel
 2. But not like a salesman
- B. He begins by proclaiming sinful nature of humanity
 1. Not just in one or two verses, but 2 ½ chapters!
 2. Wrath revealed
 3. All kinds of adjectives, adverbs
 - a. Wicked, godless people
- C. Paul establishes argument in Ch 2 by preaching Law
 1. He preaches the justness of God's judgment according to the Law
 2. All people are condemned by Law
 - a. Jews, religious people – condemned by the explicit Law
 - b. Gentiles, non-religious people, pagans – condemned by the law the works of which are written on their hearts
 3. Establishes, by Law of God, the sinfulness of humanity
- D. Preaching of the Law is missing link in contemporary Christianity
 1. One reason is not to offend
 2. Preoccupation of contemporary Christians with the NT
 3. Churches proclaim themselves as NT churches
 4. Spend little time studying, applying OT
 5. Net effect
 - a. Christians ignorant of Law
 - b. Aversive reactions to Law of God
 - c. Hate Law of God
 - d. Most Christians don't have the slightest affection for Law
- E. Cf **Psalm 119**
 1. v 97 "Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day"
 2. vv 111-112 "Your testimonies I have taken as a heritage forever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart. I have inclined my heart to perform Your statutes forever, to the very end."
 3. v 131 "I opened my mouth and panted, for I longed for Your commandments."
 4. v 143 "Trouble and anguish have overtaken me. Yet Your commandments are my delights."

- F. Paul didn't feel about the Law the way most Christians do
 - 1. Paul's feelings were more like that of the Psalmist

- G. **Paul and the Law**
 - 1. **Romans 7:7** (ESV) — 7 What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."
 - 2. **Romans 7:12** (ESV) — 12 So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.
 - 3. **Romans 7:22** (ESV) — 22 For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being...
 - 4. Paul is not reluctant to preach the Law
 - a. Even if the Law was offensive
 - 5. Paul would have flunked most of our evangelistic training programs

- H. **Jesus and the Law**
 - 1. Rich young ruler – Matthew 19
 - 2. **Matthew 19:16** (ESV) — 16 And behold, a man came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?"
 - 3. This is a "roll over" in sales terminology
 - a. Asks Jesus for the product He's selling
 - b. Jesus, as salesman, would be thrilled! He would say – believe in Me
 - 4. **Matthew 19:17** (ESV) — 17 And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments."
 - 5. What?
 - 6. Jesus begins by offending this potential customer
 - a. "Why are you asking about what is good? Do you think you have the capacity to do anything good? Only One is good."
 - b. Preaches the Law
 - (1) "Keep the Commandments"
 - c. Jesus knows no flesh will be justified by keeping commandments – but doesn't say that
 - d. He knows this guy isn't ready to make a decision
 - e. A decision to trust Christ for him would be just another good thing to do to earn a place in heaven
 - f. Jesus doesn't want him to make a decision
 - g. Jesus wants to make a convert – a real convert
 - (1) Convicted of sin
 - (2) Regenerated by HS
 - (3) Then makes a decision
 - 7. **Matthew 19:18–19** (ESV) — 18 He said to him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not

steal, You shall not bear false witness, 19 Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

- a. Jesus lists four of the 10 commandments
 - b. One from Leviticus 19
 - c. One that Jesus indicates is the second greatest commandment
8. **Matthew 19:20** (ESV) — 20 The young man said to him, “All these I have kept. What do I still lack?”
- a. Clearly clueless about his own sinfulness
9. **Matthew 19:21–22** (ESV) — 21 Jesus said to him, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” 22 When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.
- a. Give up everything
 - b. Man couldn’t do that – owned a lot
 - c. Jesus used the 1st Commandment
 - d. “You shall have no other gods before Me”
 - e. Obviously, this man had other gods before Yahweh
10. **Matthew 19:23–24** (ESV) — 23 And Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”
- a. It’s hard to enter the kingdom
11. **Matthew 19:25** (ESV) — 25 When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?”
- a. Who can be saved?
 - b. Everybody has possessions
 - c. All are rich in some sense
12. **Matthew 19:26** (ESV) — 26 But Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”
- a. Only God
13. When Jesus preaches the law, the only thing anybody can do is to cry out to God
- a. To cast oneself on His mercy alone
14. But again, Jesus, like Paul, would flunk our contemporary evangelism training
- I. Unless you preach the Law, there is no gospel