

Today's Bible reading, is the last week (for a while) that we're going to be spending on the "bad news".

To fully appreciate the **Good** News of the Gospel, first we have to understand the "**bad** news", of the very real trouble, we humans are in (without Jesus). And so in this section of Romans, Paul has been **relentless**, in telling us all about the "**bad** news". And so I said (almost a month ago now), "*For the next few weeks, it's going to be like going through a long, dark tunnel... But my, how much brighter the light of the Gospel is going to be, when we come out on the other side.*"

And today, is the last we'll spend, in that long dark tunnel. Next week, we're finished with the bad news. We'll be out of the tunnel, and into the light again, as we hear the good news, of how Jesus has set us free.

But today, we're into the 4th week of hearing the bad news.

In the 1st week, we began hearing about the downwards spiral, of Godlessness and unrighteousness, that all of humanity, are caught up in. And sometimes we might be tempted to say, "It's seems to be getting worse and worse in the world", and that's right – it is.

And so we heard that the wrath of God, is being revealed. And the wrath of God, has 2 aspects to it. *Just like a saucepan can be simmering away on a stove, but then the heat gets turned up a bit, and it boils over,,,,,* God's wrath is like that. God's wrath is currently simmering away. It is present, and active in the world today. But there is a day (which the Bible calls "the day of The Lord", (or "**the day of wrath**") when

God's wrath will suddenly boil over, in His judgment of the world.

And so, the simmering wrath of God, is being revealed, because people have turned their backs on God. They have become godlessness, or turned to idolatry.

In the 2nd week, we then began to investigate “Well, what is the wrath of God? If the wrath of God is being revealed, **what** does it look like?” And it might've been a bit of a surprise for some of us, to discover, what the simmering wrath of God actually **is**...

God handed them over, to all sorts of unrighteousness.

- Homosexuality was the key example
- And it includes all sorts of sexual perversions

And then it went on – ^{Romans 1:28} And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.

²⁹ They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹ foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

And the wrath of God is this: God gave them up, to all of these things, and to a debased mind – a worthless mind. Our

society have so rejected God, that God handed them over, so they can no longer even tell right from wrong. And so unrighteousness increases.

And all of that terrible list of sins, that are getting a go-on in our society, **ARE** the wrath of God. When **we** reject God, and when we harden our hearts against God, **God** hardens our hearts even more. And so our society descends deeper and deeper into unrighteousness – that's the simmering wrath of God.

Then in the 3rd week, we then heard how the simmering wrath of God will one day boil over, in His righteous judgment of the world. And there will be no excuses. There are so many excuses that people use, in the hope that they will escape the day of judgment... but there is **no** excuse that will keep us from it.

And so we come to this week:

And rather than have everybody share the reading today (like we normally do), I'm going to read it myself. And the reason is, it's actually pretty difficult to read this passage, as it's meant to be read. Paul is presenting 2 sides, of an argument. He's pretending there's somebody there, who's arguing with him. And Paul is answering these arguments. Sometimes, he voices what the argument is, and sometimes we have to **guess** what it is.

Paul has just said:

- People have turned their backs on God

- And so God's handed them over, to all sorts of unrighteousness. He's given them over to a debased mind, so they can't even tell right from wrong any more...
- And so, the day of wrath is coming – the day of wrath, when everybody will be judged, and found guilty before God – Jews and Gentiles alike.

And then there pipes up, this religious Jew, who claims immunity from the judgment of God, on the basis of being one of God's chosen people. And Paul talks a fair bit about "circumcision". Let me explain that:

For a Jew to be circumcised, was the outwards sign of his Jewishness. *Alright, it's sort of like talking about "the Maroons", when we're talking about the Queensland State of Origin Rugby League Football team – the maroon jersey, is the outwards sign of being a Queensland state of Origin Football player.* And the circumcision is the outwards sign of being a Jew. So, when it's talking about circumcision, it's talking about being a Jew – it's talking about the chosen people of Israel – it's talking about those who have been entrusted, with God's law (to live by).

So, let me read Romans 2:17 – 3:20 : And it begins with Paul answering, an **imaginary objector**:

(ESV)

¹⁷ But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God ¹⁸ and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law; ¹⁹ and if you are sure that you yourself **are** a guide to the blind, a **light** to those who are in darkness, ²⁰ an

instructor of the foolish, a **teacher** of children, having **in the law** the embodiment of knowledge and truth— ²¹ you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you **preach** against stealing, do you steal? ²² You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³ You who **boast in the law** **dishonour** God by **breaking** the law. ²⁴ For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

²⁵ For circumcision indeed is of value **if you obey the law, but** if you **break** the law, your circumcision becomes **uncircumcision**. [your Jewishness counts as unJewishness] ²⁶ So, if a man who is uncircumcised [a non-Jew] keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? 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. ²⁸ For **no** one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. 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 Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? ² Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. ³ What if some **were** unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? ⁴ By no means! Let God be true though **every one** were a liar, as it is written,

“That you may be justified in your words,
and prevail when you are judged. [or when you
judge]”

⁵ But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.) ⁶ By no means! For then how could God judge the world? ⁷ But if through my lie God's truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? ⁸ And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.

⁹ What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, ¹⁰ as it is written:

“None is righteous, no, not one;

¹¹ no one understands;

no one seeks for God.

¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;

no one does good,
not even one."

¹³ "Their throat is an open grave;
they use their tongues to deceive."

"The venom of asps is under their lips."

¹⁴ "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness."

¹⁵ "Their feet are swift to shed blood;

¹⁶ in their paths are ruin and misery,

¹⁷ and the way of peace they have not known."

¹⁸ "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. ²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

Did you manage to follow it? It's a bit to(ey)-and-fro(ey), isn't it...

But they're logical arguments.

We talked about the downwards spiral:

- People have turned their backs on God

- And so God's handed them over, to all sorts of unrighteousness. He's given them over to a debased mind, so they can't even tell right from wrong any more...
- And so God is going to judge the unrighteous.

But surely that doesn't include the Jews does it? – I mean, they have God's law. It **tells** them what's right and what's wrong...

And so, the Jews felt they were immune from God's judgment, for 2 reasons:

- Firstly, because they were God's chosen people – surely God wouldn't judge them.
- And secondly, because they're not **like** everybody else. They **do** know right from wrong – at least in most things – because they have God's law. The scriptures tell them, what God requires...

But you see, the problem wasn't in the knowing – it was in the doing... And **you** know what that's like, don't you? There's times, when we know the right thing to do, but we do the wrong thing...

And it gives God a bad name, doesn't it??? God never gives Himself a bad name... Anything the Lord does, brings Him nothing but glory... But when those who claim to be God's people, do evil, God is dishonoured because of it...

To our shame, we sometimes bring the name of God into disrepute... - it's happened all through history:

- The religious wars and the crusades, where people were slaughtered in the Name of Jesus – we can't pretend that didn't happen.

- The Spanish inquisition
- The trials and executions of so-called “heretics”
- Tele-evangelists getting rich, at the expense of the desperate and the poor
- Well-known preachers, getting caught in adultery and homosexuality
- The sexual abuse of children by priests and other religious workers...
- A local Christian businessman who lies and cheats...
- The fanatic who blows up abortion clinics
- The so-called Christian, who lives in lavish extravagance, while his overseas labourers don't even have enough to eat...

When those who claim to be God's people, do evil, guess what – God gets the blame...

And so, what he's talking about here, is **empty** religion. Religious observance, is not enough. For a Jew, being a Jew, and knowing God's Law, is all very good and nice, but it is of no value, if that person **breaks** the law that he knows. It's not the **holder** of the law, who is righteous before God, but the **keeper** of The Law...

He says, even the **uncircumcised** – alright, a **non-Jew**, who's **heart** is right, and **keeps** the law, is more of a Jew than someone who's born as a Jew, but **doesn't** keep the Law... Because your heritage won't save you – no matter how godly your parents are – if **your** heart isn't right before God.

And so, empty religion would not exempt the Jew from Judgment. Nor, would I say, will empty religion exempt us from judgment...

What is empty religion?

Well, a lot of people today might picture a traditional style church service, and say “Oh well, that’s empty religion.”... “Where as our worship, it’s alive and vibrant...”

But you know what? A full-on, hyped up concert experience, with everyone excited and clapping, and hands raised,, can be more empty, then 2 people, quietly kneeling before God, in humble penitence...

It’s not about the external show... It’s about what’s going on in here – in your heart...

- It’s not about how much you know, and how many scriptures you’ve managed to memorise;
- It’s not about your heritage, and whether your parents were Christians or not...

It’s about our hearts: Are our hearts yielded to God???

So, if this is the case (that Jews are still subject to judgment), the logical objection is, “Well, what advantage is there to being a Jew?”

And a lot of people would say, “No advantage at all”... But that’s not what Paul says. The Jews continue to be, God’s chosen people. For a start, **the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God...**

Our Old Testament, are the Sacred Scriptures of the Jews. They foretold the coming of Jesus. We can learn so much about God, and the heart that He has for His people... Don't you ever believe the lie that the God of the Old Testament, is very different to the God of the New Testament... Whenever I hear somebody say that, I feel duty-bound to ask them, "Have you ever read the Old Testament and the New Testament?"

The Old Testament, is full of grace and mercy – it's not just about righteousness and judgment... And likewise, the New Testament also proclaims grace, mercy, righteousness **and** judgment.... I hope when you read your bible, you don't only read the New Testament.

Let's move on. Paul then says: ³ **What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?...** No, it doesn't...

The Jews thought they weren't going to be judged, because they were God's chosen people... And God had made them some promises... He gave them promises of blessing,,,,, but he also gave them promises of curses¹.

Even though Israel would break their covenant with God, The Lord would never break His covenant with Israel... Because part of His covenant, was "When you break this covenant – when you stop worshipping me, and begin to worship other Gods – when you turn from the path of righteousness, and do evil, I will punish you"...

Here's one example: **Deuteronomy 30:**

¹⁵ "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. ¹⁶ If you obey the commandments of YHWH your God that I command you today, by loving YHWH your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and YHWH your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it.

¹⁷ **But** if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, ¹⁸ I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. ¹⁹ I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live....

That's just one example, of many.

God, never breaks a covenant... The trouble is, the Jews thought that the covenant would only bring them blessings... But if they rebelled against God, His covenant with them, promised to them, that they would be judged... And they were... And they will be again.

Now, we can learn a lot from this. Many Christians are in danger of becoming just like the Jews. We love to claim the

blessings, but we ignore our responsibilities under the covenant...

Did you know, even in the New Testament, we are warned (many times) against taking our position as God's children for granted... Here's a couple of examples:

- Jesus tells us that, if we won't forgive others, God won't forgive usⁱⁱ.
- We're warned against falling awayⁱⁱⁱ
- We're told we will be holy and blameless before God, **if** we continue in the faith^{iv}.

You see, this is why we study the Scriptures; This is why we encourage one another; This is why we urge one-another on.... Because as God's children, we should never presume upon our privileged position. Paul makes it clear, that even as Christians, we should fear God – we should deeply respect, and honour Him, and that we should be children of obedience. And we'll see that coming out, later in the Book of Romans.^v

Now, at about this point, the objector throws in a ridiculous argument: Alright, if by our **un**righteousness, it makes God look more righteous, then it wouldn't be right for God to judge us... Now, that's just ridiculous. But a lot of people live that way today...

God is shown to be righteous, because He saves, and He **continues** to save... So therefore, it doesn't matter if I sin – God will forgive me, and isn't He great...

What a ridiculous notion... There was a church in Corinth, where a man was 'shacked-up' with his step-mother...^{vi} And

the church were proud of it... Look how free we are. And Paul said, “I’ve already judged him – put him out”.

So, if the Jews continue to be God’s chosen people,,,,, in relation to judgment, are they any better off? ... No they’re not...

No one is righteous. Not one. And at this point, Paul strings together, a heap of Old Testament quotes, about people who have earned the judgment of God because they do evil, and guess what... In their context, most (if not all) of them are referring to Jews...

So, the bad news is, the whole world, is accountable to God. And so V20 says: ²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

No one, can ever be made righteous by doing good deeds, because none of us have that power – to make ourselves righteous in God’s sight. The Law – the Scriptures – the Old Testament, helps us to know what’s right and wrong... But the more we try to do the right thing, the more we realise we just can’t achieve it.

The more righteous one becomes, the more conscious they are, of the unrighteousness that remains...

That’s the predicament.

3:9, tells us that we are **under sin**.

- We don't just live in sin.
- We don't just do a bit of sin
- We don't just think a bit of sin, or say sinful things
- It's not just our attitude toward god
- We're not just affected **by** sin, or tempted **to** sin...

The predicament is, we are “**under sin**”

What that means is, sin **rules** us. Sin, has rule and reign in our life... And therefore, we are absolutely incapable of being justified... Sin controls us...

What we need, is a **new** rule – a **new** master – a **new** Lord – the Lord Jesus Christ...

Someone who can take us out, from living “**under sin**”, so that sin **doesn't** rule us any longer – Christ Jesus, our Lord...

And so, it doesn't matter how religious someone is, or how many good deeds they think they do... unless Jesus is their Lord, they are “**under sin**” – they are ruled by sin – they are controlled by sin, and therefore, subject to judgment. Jew and Gentile alike – No matter how religious we are...

And next week, we're coming out of the dark tunnel... We've heard **enough** of the bad news – I hope by now, that Paul has convinced all of us, of our need for a saviour – a new ruler – a new Lord... And next week, we're going to hear about the righteousness that comes through faith.

Questions?

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- ⁱ Deut 30
 - ⁱⁱ Matt 6:14, Matt 18:21-35
 - ⁱⁱⁱ Heb 3:12
 - ^{iv} Colossians 1:23
 - ^v Romans 6
 - ^{vi} 1 Cor 5