

Any preacher, who aims to be both thorough, and true to God's word, will always have a bit of a dilemma, when he preaches from this section of Romans.

And the reason for the dilemma, is we preachers – well, we just love to preach the Gospel – we love to be able to share “The **Good** News”.

And so, yeah there's times when we cover the wrath of God; and judgment; and the consequences of sin, and of “**not** believing” in Jesus, but there is a very real temptation, to briefly skip **through** all of this stuff, so we can get to what we **really** want to preach about... – being saved.

And my dilemma today (and probably for the next 3 or 4 weeks) is, this section of Paul's letter to the Romans, gives me **no** opportunity for this. There is no ‘let-up’ – Paul is **relentless**, in laying out the human predicament. He goes on and on...

You see, the Gospel isn't “**Good** News”, unless first we understand the “**bad** news”. And as I said, usually the temptation for us preachers, is to quickly skip through the bad news, so we can get to the good news just as quick as we can...

But for about the next 2 chapters, Paul is very detailed (he takes his time), in explaining “the **bad** news”.

And so, I'm not going to apologise (for I will never apologise for God's word). I am however, giving you a bit of a heads-up – I'm giving you a warning – that today, and for the next few weeks, our Bible readings, may be a bit “tough going”.

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.

Over these next few weeks, we're going to be hearing about the downwards spiral of godlessness and sin. And because, all of the sordid details and the reasons for the wrath of God, are spelled out in detail, right here in God's word, I believe The Lord wants us to know, and to understand this, (in detail).

And so we're **not** going to quickly skip over the bad news, to get to the Good News... We're going to give it the same attention, that we will give everything else, in this book of Romans.

And I believe, we will be far richer because of it... Over the next few weeks, as Paul outlines the utterly hopeless situation that all humanity find themselves in: the immorality; the social evils; the corruption; and the vile state of humanity – Totally lost – totally depraved – totally hopeless.... ,, My prayer, is that we will come out the other side, being acutely aware, of how wonderful the blessing is, to be saved, through Christ Jesus our Lord

My prayer is that:

- we will love Jesus more, because of what He has done for us on the cross.
- My prayer, is that we will appreciate more, what Christ our Lord has saved us from.
- That we will glorify God, **for** His righteousness in judgment,
- **and** we will glorify Him for His righteousness in **saving**

- And I pray, that we'll be given a new energy – a new reason – a new vigour, for preaching the Gospel – that we would be moved with love for our neighbour, and a desire for them to be rescued, from their current and pending, judgment.

Now, having said that, Paul is a preacher too. And whilst we've got pretty much 2 full chapters, where we don't get to hear the Good News of Jesus, he both begins and ends, with the Good News. He's already introduced this passage, with the Good News. We heard it last week, as we read V16 &17.

Do you remember how the verses last week were all linked with the word "because"? Well, this verse is linked in the same way.

So do you remember the progression from last week? Paul said:

- I'm eager to preach the Gospel. Why?
- Because I'm not ashamed of the Gospel. Why?
- Because the Gospel is the power of God for salvation. Why?
- Because **in** the Gospel, the righteousness of God is being revealed.

That's the progression. But why is the righteousness of God being revealed?

And this is where today's reading begins – why is the righteousness of God being revealed?

- because the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

And so Paul begins with the Good News. Don't try and separate last week's message from this week's message. Remember, Romans is a letter. And when you read a letter, you don't cut it all up into different chunks.

Paul **begins** with the Good News, "The Gospel is the Power of God to save"... but who cares about that??? If you were to take this message out into the streets, this very week, "Believe in Jesus the Gospel is the Power of God to save." Who's going to listen to you? Who cares if it's the Power of God to save, or not? Who needs saving???

And so, to fully understand why the Gospel is good news, first we have to understand:

- That we are caught up in the wrath of God
 - **Why** we are caught up in the wrath of God
 - And why (without Jesus) we deserve death."
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- I'm eager to preach the Gospel. Why?
 - Because I'm not ashamed of the Gospel. Why?
 - Because the Gospel is the power of God for salvation. Why?
 - Because in the Gospel, the righteousness of God is being revealed. Why?
 - V18 because the wrath of God is being revealed
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Isn't that interesting? *Usually, the goody saves you from the baddy. Or the hero, saves you from the villain. Or, someone steps in and saves you from some random disaster...*

But that's not what the salvation of the Gospel is about. God, saves those who have faith in Jesus, from the wrath of God. God's righteousness gets revealed, as He saves us from His Own wrath, which is in itself, "righteous"...

Now, that's going to do your head in, until you understand, the righteousness of God, which includes His righteous wrath.

You see, the problem that people today have, with "the wrath of God", is that we humans can't help but project our experiences of "imperfect" wrath, onto the term. We tend to think of "wrath" as being when somebody totally loses it – when they totally lose control of themselves, and they lash out in a violent, uncontrolled rage... But God's wrath is not like that. God's wrath is "righteous". It is right. It is **totally** under His control, and as such, is actually an expression of His goodness.

Now, that might sound a bit strange to you, but "the wrath of God" *is a term that expresses the settled and active opposition of God's holy nature to everything that is evilⁱ.*

And biblically, the wrath of God, has 2 aspects to it – a simmering – and a boiling over.

V18 says that **the wrath of God is beingⁱⁱ revealed**

That means that God's wrath is already present – it's already active. We can already catch little glimpses of it in the world today. But we also know that there is a time (the Bible calls it "The Day of The Lord"), when God's wrath bubbles over, and comes in one big, hard hit.

So, “the wrath of God” is sort of like a saucepan on a stove – simmering away. But on “the day of the Lord”, that simmering saucepan of God’s wrath, will boil over, in the judgment of the world.

Now, the concept of “the wrath of God”, has pretty much gone out of fashion, because it doesn’t sound very nice, does it? (and we all like nice things)

And so some people say, “If God is a God of love, then there is no such thing as “the wrath of God””. And they try to explain it away in 2 ways:

- Some will say, “The wrath of God” is simply a way of describing the natural consequences of sin. Like:
 - If you rob a bank, you might get shot during the robbery
 - If you drink to much grog, you might get liver disease
 - If you’re rude and arrogant, you might have no friends
 - If you sleep around, you might catch a venereal disease

Alright, so some think of “The wrath of God” as a way of describing the natural result of sin.

- And others might describe “The wrath of God” as “God taking the brakes off”. We’re on a slippery slope. And when we turn our backs on God, He just takes the brakes off, and down we go.

Now, the problem with these two views, is that’s really not what’s being described here. **The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven.** That’s a way of saying that this

wrath, is **God's doing**. It is His active judgment on evil – it's not just happenstance – It's being revealed from heaven. It is judgment from the very throne of God Himself.

And 3 times, it says “ **God handed them over.**”

- V24 *Therefore, **God handed them over** in the passions of their hearts to uncleanness, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves.*
- V26 *Because of this, **God handed them over** to dishonourable passions*
- V28 *...**God handed them over** to a worthless mind*

Throughout the Old Testament, there were times, when a society had become so evil, God would “hand them over” to judgment. God would “hand over” Israel's enemies, for Israel to conquer, in punishment for their evil. **And** when Israel turned **their** backs on God, and turned to idolatry, God handed *His own people over, to another nation as punishment for their sins*. And here, Paul says that God has “handed over”, the ungodly, to all sorts of depravity...ⁱⁱⁱ

The wrath of God, is exactly that – God's wrath – God's punishment for sin... - Something which is simmering away now, but will boil over, on “the day of The Lord”.

Now, when Paul is talking about “**ungodliness and unrighteousness of men**”, I think it's best to understand it, **both** at a personal level, but more so, at a societal level. And so, not every individual will have the same sin, and the same vices. The downwards spiral of “**ungodliness and unrighteousness of men**”, can be seen best, in a society, as ungodliness and unrighteousness increase.

And the “ungodliness” and “unrighteousness” thing, is a bit like “the chicken and the egg” – which comes first?

“Unrighteousness”, leads people turn their backs on God (godless), and when they reject God, God hands them over to sin, and their unrighteousness increases. And so, it’s like a downwards spiral – one leads to the other, but you’re going down-hill the whole time.

And we can see this, very clearly, in **our** society. Our sin – our attitude toward God, has caused us (as a society) to reject God. And as our society, have become more and more “Godless”, it has become more and more morally corrupt, and bankrupt.

When I was preparing for this message, I listened to a sermon that would’ve been recorded in the late 1960’s or the early 1970’s. And in it, this preacher^{iv} said that this catalogue of sins, reads like it’s come from a Police desk blotter – in other words, “a whole bunch of sins that are crimes, to be punished with imprisonment” ...

And yet now, in 2016, in Australia, most of it’s decriminalised. And what **once** used to be **illegal** – what used to be “an offence” in society, is becoming “accepted”, and dare I say, “common place”.

So, I dug out an old commentary, that I bought second hand, at a Lifeline Bookfest, first printed in 1955. And let me read to you, what William Barclay said in 1955.

“it might seem that this passage is the work of some almost hysterical moralist who was exaggerating the

contemporary situation and painting it in colours of rhetorical hyperbole. It describes a situation of a degeneracy of morals almost without parallel in human history. But there is nothing that Paul said that the Greek and Roman writers of the age did not themselves say.... ”v

And when I read that, I thought, “Wow, how far has society shifted in the last 60 years?”

In 1955 Great Britain, the immoral Greek society that Paul described, was absolutely unthinkable. In the 1960’s and 70’s, much of it was criminal and an offence to society...

But now, possibly the most immoral and amoral of societies – 1st century Greece and Rome, very closely resemble our own society.

How can our society crumble so quickly? I’ll tell you why – it’s because in our un-righteousness, our society has rejected God, and turned to all sorts of idolatry.

If you take away the one, true, living God, you always have to replace Him with a lie.

And in 1st century Greek culture, that lie, was a multitude of Gods. They had a god for this, and a god for that... and they worshipped these gods, and very quickly they fell into immorality. In fact, in the temples of some of their gods, there were thousands of cult prostitutes, and that’s how you would worship those gods.

Divorce was rampant. Marriage meant nothing. One commentary I read, stated that 14 out of 15 Roman Emperors^{vi}, used to engage in homosexual acts (often with young boys)...

When a people turn their back on God, immorality is fast to follow.

A good example in the Bible, is when Moses was up on Mt Sinai, getting given the 10 Commandments. And while he's up there, the people get Aaron to make them a golden calf, and when Moses and Joshua come down, they hear the revelry. And the language is about how the people "broke loose" – *The people had cast off all restraint; "they were running wild and ... out of control"*^{vii} – it's almost the picture of a drunken orgy...

And our society today, has turned its back on God.

People have turned to all sorts of idols. An idol is anything that we worship in the place of God. An idol is any lie that we believe, that makes us suppress the truth, and turn our backs on God.

And there's a multitude of idols that our nation has, but I'm just going to list 4 of them:

I guess the first, and most obvious, are gods of other religions. And as our nation becomes more and more "multi-cultural", we should expect to see our culture becoming more and more "multi-faith" or "multi-religion". Please, never believe the lie, that we all worship the one God. That is not true. There is

only one true God, and He is very jealous for our undivided attention.

You know, we tend to think of “jealousy” as a bad thing, but there is a kind of jealousy that is good. *I am very jealous for my wife. I don't want to share her with any other man. And if she were to give her attention to another man, I would be exceedingly jealous. And it would be right to be jealous. And God is jealous in that same way, for us.*

A second example of idolatry in Australia, would be New-age spiritualism. Eastern mysticism, crystals and transcendental meditation; practising Yoga, Thai Chi, Rake, Iridology; biodynamic farming.....

All sorts of new-age spiritualism, is dabbling in the occult, and getting involved in the worship of demons.

A third example of idolatry in Australia, would also have to be one of the most common forms of it. It is to make a god of our own creation. Many people, have reconstructed God to be a god of their own making – not God as He has revealed Himself. And of course, their God is someone who won't judge them; doesn't require anything of them; and is very happy for them to live their lives for themselves. And most often, this god that they believe in, is very much like themselves.

And a fourth example of idolatry in Australia, I had trouble coming up with a name for it. A god of ideological science. Theories of evolution and the big bang ceased long ago, to be

a quest for truth. In fact, they are in themselves a suppression of the truth.

If I were walking in the wilderness, and stumbled upon a “Leatherman” – a folding multi-tool thing, I wouldn’t for a moment assume, that it was an accident of nature, that formed that Leatherman. It has obviously been well designed and constructed – it could never happen by chance... And yet a kangaroo, or a sheep, or a bird, or a fish, or a human being, is infinitely more complex than a Leatherman. And yet people claim as “science” that, no it hasn’t been designed – it just happened by chance. It’s ridiculous.

V19 & 20, tell us that God has made Himself known in creation. God has put His fingerprints on creation, everywhere we look. What He has made, should instantly reveal to us, His **eternal power, and His divine nature**. And so, nobody has an excuse. We all get to see and touch and feel, creation.

But in their **unrighteousness**, they suppress the truth... And that’s why I’ve called it “the god of ideological science”. The **ideas** of men, are claspings at straws, in the name of “science”. And they come up with a theory, that lets them deny the creator. And yet that theory, has so many holes in it.

²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for

images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Friends, “Humanism”, is another way of worshipping the creature, rather than the creator.

When a society turns its back on God, it’s not long until it descends into immorality. And we can see this even on a family level:

- The Grandfather is a Godly and moral man
- His son, isn’t really a man of faith – maybe he goes to church occasionally, but he always tries to do the right thing. He stays married to the one woman his whole life, even though they’re not that happy together.
- But **his** son – the grandson of the Godly Grandfather, is a drunk who sleeps around before he gets married, and when he does get married, it only lasts a few years... He’d never ever set foot in a church...
- And **his** kids are almost uncontrollable... they’re already showing signs of severe anti-social behaviour. They’ll lie to your face, and nobody’ll be surprised when they end up in jail.

(a generational change) A downwards spiral.

And it all begins when one generation turns its back on God. And that’s why it’s so important, for us parents, to hold firm, to the faith in the one, true God. If the way we live, presents to our children, that worshipping God isn’t that important to us, well God and morality will be even less important to them, and even less important to their children and even less important to their children.

And there will be a downward, downward spiral, of godlessness and immorality, until something happens to break that spiral. Because, remember how this passage was introduced? The Gospel is the power of God to save. When God intervenes into a life, and even into a society, He can break us out of it.

And the great Christian revivals of history, have been the times when God has brought whole societies, out of the downwards spiral...

I think we'd better leave it at that , today. And we'll continue on with this same passage next week.

ⁱ Morris, L. *The Epistle to the Romans*. Eerdmans. Grand Rapids. 1988 . p.76

ⁱⁱ Moo, D.J., 1996. *The Epistle to the Romans*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

ⁱⁱⁱ Moo, D.J., 1996. *The Epistle to the Romans*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

^{iv} David Pawson

^v Barclay W. 1955. *The Letter to the Romans – The Daily Study Bible*. Saint Andrew Press, Glasgow. (P.23)

^{vi} Barclay W. 1955. *The Letter to the Romans – The Daily Study Bible*. Saint Andrew Press, Glasgow.

^{vii} Kaiser, W.C., Jr., 1990. Exodus. In F. E. Gaebelin, ed. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.