

WHY BEING GOOD IS NOT ENOUGH

INTRODUCTION

Take us through second chapter of Romans. On the way, I want to highlight a few points that are helpful in explaining tricky issues around judgment to people who have no faith.

Last chapter – Paul took us to the nadir – the lowest point – of humanity. **Ungrateful, senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless.**

Now he anticipates some pushback, on two separate fronts – from Jews and from non-Jews.

- Have you ever had to tell off two kids who were both in the wrong? Sometimes they focus their efforts on protesting their innocence; other times they adopt the strategy of making the other child look bad. Sometimes you get one of each, other times they both do the same. In all cases, they end up making themselves look worse.
- Paul anticipates mud-slinging between the two (it was a common fault-line in the early Church) and starts out with a blanket statement.

NOBODY GETS TO CONDEMN ANYBODY ELSE (V1-4)

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realising that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

- This is intended as a leveller
- Judging actions vs judging people. Jesus, “do not judge” but also “pearls before swine”.
 - Not saying we shouldn't make statements about what behaviour is right or wrong
 - But we don't get to occupy the moral high ground, or pass judgment on another person
 - E.g. “Gluttony is a sin” but not, “you are a wicked person, deserving of judgment, because you are addicted to eating.”
- Some people clearly saw the ongoing existence of wrongdoing as God being slow or unwilling to judge people. Not so – He's patient! More on these three words – patience, forbearance/tolerance, kindness later.
- Having put a hold on any mud-slinging, Paul then explains...

EVERYONE GETS WHAT THEY DESERVE (V5-11)

But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. God 'will repay each person according to what they have done.' To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honour and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honour and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favouritism.

- God's really clear – He's fair. Anybody who does good will receive eternal life. Anybody who does evil will suffer punishment.
- Are your heresy sensors going off at the moment? Isn't this a Gospel of Works? No! This has always been the case. You can receive Eternal Life by works – if you're completely perfect. It's just that nobody qualifies.
- Getting what we deserve isn't good news.

“BUT WE DIDN’T KNOW!” (V12-16)

All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.) This will take place on the day when God judges people’s secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

- Not a “get out of jail free” card – Paul says we can’t dodge responsibility.
- Why?
 - Firstly – Chapter 1: we all have enough around us in Creation to make us aware of God’s existence and divine power. Yet a sizable proportion of humanity ignore Him.

POLL – do we have an absolute standard of morality?

- Secondly – we have an innate sense that there is an absolute right & wrong, not just a social construct – but we fail in our attempts to keep even our own rules!
- So we know that we’re condemned by any standard that counts. Now if only we’d take this prompting and call out to God! But normally, we opt instead for *comparative morality*.
 - It’s the mentality of two people running away from the bear. One of them says, “you’ll never outrun the bear” and the other says, “I don’t need to – I just need to outrun you!”

“BUT WE’RE GOD’S COVENANT PEOPLE!” (V17-27)

Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and boast in God; if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of little children, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth – you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law, do you dishonour God by breaking the law? As it is written: ‘God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.’

Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. So then, if those who are not circumcised keep the law’s requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a law-breaker.

- To many Jews, this was a “get out of jail free” card – but John the Baptist rejects it:

And do not think you can say to yourselves, “We have Abraham as our father.” I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The axe has been laid to the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

POLL – what difference does covenant make?

- Paul says that the Jews’ privileged status as His Covenant People increases their *responsibility*, not their *righteousness*.
- He points out that under the terms of their covenant, they’re just as guilty as non-Jews because they too fail to live up to God’s standards.
- This doesn’t mean that OT Jews weren’t saved – but they were saved because of their dependence on God, not because of their innate righteousness as covenant people.
- In fact, their lawbreaking was a source of dishonour to God – just like a serial adulterer brings shame on their spouse and gives marriage a bad name.

A SNEAK PREVIEW (V28-29)

A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God.

It's like Paul can't quite resist putting in a sneak preview of the good news to come. There's hope – just wait!

- Laws written on hearts
- Jews and non-Jews made into one new humanity, connected by the Holy Spirit living in us

THREE TRUTHS ABOUT GOD

POLL – what speed do you cruise at on the motorway?

Nobody wants sin to go unpunished – in fact, as a society we trawl through people's lives to find "sins" to punish. We just want our sin to go unpunished. Or, to put it another way, we all want people worse than us to be punished. Paedophiles are often the subject of prison violence at the hands of other prisoners.

1. He is patient
2. He is forbearing (not tolerant as we use it today)
He is holding back temporarily from giving us the punishment we deserve, because he wants us to right it ourselves.
 - Taking TM to police to report hit-and-run
 - Admission of guilt better than being found guilty
3. He is kind
Why would He hold back? Because He's kind. God wants us to do well. He wants us to succeed. However much the best father wants their kid to succeed, they only poorly reflect God's benevolence towards people. He won't compromise and "just ignore" sin, so He instead holds off punishment, makes a way for us to be made right, and offers time for us to take it.

Next time someone condemns a God who would "create people just to condemn them to hell" – there's a different perspective – a God who's patient, forbearing and kind.