

## None Can Boast (Rom 2-3:20)

Last week, we looked at the tragedy of those who reject God and His truth. They end up being and doing what God never intended when He made people in His image.

Why did God go to all the trouble of creating humanity? Why doesn't He just end it and cut His losses? And how do we treat those rebelling against our God?

May we be drawn closer to knowing God by finding answers to these questions of faith and life.

### Prayer

Paul has been inspired by God to unpack (explain) the Gospel step by step. And He is passionate about preaching it. *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes* (Rom 1:16). We want that kind of conviction. Paul begins by telling us the Gospel is God's way for people to be saved (from God's condemnation). And it involves God declaring a person righteous. And the only way a person can receive God's righteousness is by faith (1:17).

Paul divides humanity into two categories – those outside the original covenant of God (Gentiles) and those God chose as His witnesses to the rest of the world (Jews). Paul begins a case (like a lawyer in a courtroom) to prove faith is the only

way to be saved. Because people fail God's standards of righteousness. They break His laws.

### God Rejecter (Picture)

Here's a guy who's made it in his own eyes. Money is his god. In a culture like pre-Christian Rome, it's easy to see the sin list in chapter 1. A hundred years ago, Paul's list would have been shocking. Not now. But no matter what is the acceptable way to live – God is the judge. Even polite, fun, religious, caring people will be condemned for going their own way. They resist or suppress God's truth. They ignore God's glory in creation and His moral demands for right and wrong. They exchange God's truth for a lie. Out goes the Bible and in comes evolution, Greek mythology, condom machines and pot. And God lets sin have its way...so they experience the consequences.

We all have loved ones we hope will come to their good senses, and stop shutting out God's truth. Does God write these people off? The answer to that question is that Christ died for us, while we were yet sinners.

As we move into our passage today, I want you to notice Paul uses ways of writing to talk to different groups. And he brings up the kind of questions they would ask – to give an answer (as

we're listening in). They're called rhetorical devices. So it's going to sound like Paul is talking directly to you. And maybe the Holy Spirit will use that to convict. But he's speaking to another person...as if he's in the room with him. It has the effect of saying, "Don't get too proud of yourself while God is condemning obvious Gentile rebellion. He knows about your sin, too."

### **Picture: Condemner**

We will learn later this person is a Jew. But let's not leave it there. This condemning person feels justified by his superior understanding of God and His will. The Jew has the national heritage, family line, the Torah, tradition and synagogue. How about a religious Canadian (living by the golden rule)? He may have family heritage, the Bible, traditions and church. In both examples – even though they live by a higher standard because of God's written expectations, they fail to obey completely. They are missing a heart like David – of humility and repentance and love for God.

### **Read 2:1-4**

Humans are not worthy to condemn because their judgement is tainted v2-3. It's like the old saying...when you point your finger in judgement at someone else...three of your fingers are pointing right back at you. One person condemning another is a

lie...because no one is truly just. Maybe just better at covering up. Have we ever honored someone or something more than God? Have we ever given into temptation of the body or the mind? (Put up hand) Condemning lost people doesn't impress God. Instead, it backfires. Only God's judgement is truly objective, not tainted with sin.

But at least we have scruples!

### **Picture of Foosball Table**

TWU foosball: no spinning and flukes. Still avoiding work.

Sinning: no matter how little - fails the righteousness of God.

God's delay in punishment (<sup>wrath v4</sup>) is His patient kindness, waiting for repentance. When our hearts have gotten hard toward others or we've stopped caring the most about God...Jesus is knocking at the door of our heart, waited for us to repent too (Rev 3:19-22). That we may have full fellowship with Him again.

When we don't get what we deserve for punishment at the time; Don't be fooled into thinking God is ok with it. Repenting means changing patterns of thinking and behavior...along with confession. If we confess our sins... 1Jn 1:9 Let's see what happens when people don't change and lean on their own ways to be righteous.

### **Read 2:5-11**

A hard heart is in spiritual danger...just like hardening of the arteries leads to physical death. Rejecting God's offer of forgiveness leads to God's wrath.

Jesus gives us an idea of what that's like in Mark 9:42,47-48. Read God does not show favoritism (v11) when it comes to rejecting the truth and following evil. God is just - wrath for evil, peace for good. Jews have no right to think that the covenant, by itself, excuses them from God's judgement any more than the Gentiles. Jews need to experience God's grace in Christ.

There's a doctrinal **elephant in v6-11** that we should not ignore. Is Paul saying we can be saved by our persistent good works? Paul is talking about the standard that God judges all humans. We must remember that Paul is building a case (context). If people could live completely righteous – they would gain eternal life. The only way people can be declared righteous by their own merits is by not sinning and doing God's will. This will lead up to the conclusion in v20. Remember, Paul hasn't begun to talk about faith yet. Faith that opens the door to being redeemed by God. So every day is a chance to make a difference forever. But I will at least point out that the person who did meet all these requirements...is ruling in heaven today.

## **Read v12-16**

God knows whether people have His written law or not. And He judges based on obedience to what they have. One has the Torah law. Another, the natural law (creation and conscience). All made in the image of God but infected with a sin nature. All will be judged and condemned based on obedience. So the Jew with the law has no advantage over the Gentile unless it's obeyed. Paul's first mention of Jesus is someone who shows God their deepest secrets. They won't get away with anything.

All will face a judgement...some to punishment and some to reward. Jesus will be separating the sheep from the goats (Matt 25), knowing people's works and their motives (2:16).

Church, it is so important that we get to know God by His word and step out in faith to experience Him. Then we will know we have a just and merciful God. Faith in Christ is the way to salvation. And I trust in the justness and mercy of God to sort how that works...even for 'that guy' on the remote Island without a Bible. You may be surprised that many are testifying God is using dreams to rescue people deep in Muslim territory.

## **Picture (Self-Assured Jew)**

Now Paul gets right down to the core identity of a Jew. And what they think will save them from God's judgement. would cling to as a life-raft for his soul.

The law (vv.17–24) and the sign of circumcision (vv. 25–29).

### **Read 2:17-24**

The problem is not that the Jews are wrong to boast God has given them the law. The problem is they're boasting in their righteousness...when they're not even living up to the law. Maybe in their own minds. Paul lists a number of privileges they can enjoy: **1.** Name-Jew **2.** Torah **3.** Knows God **4.** Knows God's will **5.** able to discern right from wrong. **6.** A guide for the blind **7.** Light in the dark **8.** Instructors of the foolish **9.** teachers of infants

A guide, light, Instructor and teacher refer to their role as witnesses to the Gentiles. Paul doesn't hold back in pointing out that their hypocrisy has destroyed their witness – giving God a bad reputation.

From our studies in Mark, we know that the Torah law had been compromised by the traditions handed down by the elders. Their law was even more burdensome and missed the mark of faith and love- as Jesus pointed out.

Now Paul moves to their hope in circumcision (Gen 17:9-13). The Jews had really been through a terrible persecution after Alexander the Great died. When land was divided among the generals, the Jews were under constant pressure to compromise their identity. Under Antiochus, there was an attempt to wipe out Judaism all together – parents who tried to

have their son circumcised were killed along with the child. Jews living among the Gentiles needed a separate identity from the pagan influence – circumcision became vital to them. This was also a major debate in the first church because Jews who became believers were being told that believing Gentiles didn't need to be circumcised. To them it was like denying the Jewish faith all together. It sounds right now like Paul is dismissing the Jews altogether but that is not the case at all. And neither should we. It's just that we haven't read the rest of the letter.

### **Read 2:25 Circumcision**

Paul goes on to cite Moses (Deut 10:16 see also Jer 4:4) that God wants loyalty from the heart more than an outward sign. A desire to please God from the heart by His Spirit (v29). This is a little glimpse at the secret to a righteous life and being freed from the law and sin.

### **Read 3:1-2**

Paul reassures that God's covenant with Israel is a good thing. It's how we received the Old Testament. Paul goes on to say that God showed His faithfulness through the covenant, even when Israel did not. This again displays God's righteousness and mercy. Paul is quick to point out the folly of those say that their sin is good because it magnifies Gods goodness.

The conclusion to the case against humanity being righteous is backed up with God's word in the Psalms (14:1-3; 5:9: 140:3).

### **Read 3:9-20 All under Sin's Power**

Can anyone boast they are righteous before God. Does anyone completely obey the law? NO! The Law doesn't save...it shows us our sin (v20).

Why did God go to all the trouble of creating humanity? *Love*

Why doesn't He just end it and cut His losses? *Patience*

And how are we to treat those who are rebelling against our Lord? *Love one another so they will see Jesus is alive. And tell them the truth, by the grace of the Holy Spirit.*

Beware of friendship (Ja 4:4) that compromises faith and witness. But Jesus was called a friend of sinners! Yes, Jesus was called a drunkard at the same time (Matt 11:19). Jesus took time to eat with, heal and share life with sinners (hated for it). But He loved them enough to tell them the truth of their sin condition. Later, when Christ paid the ransom for their sins and rose victorious from the tomb, God added many to the church - because many seeds of repentance had been sown and their hearts were ready.

In John 15:15, Jesus said who his friends are. After 3 years with Him constantly...after He had shared all God's teaching with them before the

cross, Jesus said to His disciples, "now I call you my friends. **Those who obey Jesus, are His friends.** Followers of Jesus have a fragrance of Christ – that the world hates.

I hope the Gospel is shared widely around town, backed up by the undeniable ring of truth that Jesus is alive in rugged old Lillooet.

It starts with examining our own hearts. Do we really believe loving each other is God's way to show Jesus is alive? Do we bear grudges. Do we question another's faith – without doing much to help them?

God redeems people so they experience His power in the world through the body of Christ. This individual Christianity thing: pick y'r own sermon at home do y'r own church thing when it's convenient, or by remote; that's not what Jesus prayed for. While this might be a word of conviction for some, it's also a reminder to pray for our brothers and sisters who are getting squeezed by the pressure of this world. And pray for those who are away or limited due to health. They're missing out, big time. Tell them you care.

None can boast righteousness without God's great mercy. And He is showing it among us. Keep on sowing and keep on loving one another...so our town sees God's love and truth.