

October 9, 2016 by Steve Brandon



# The Bad News

## Romans 1:18

- 1. The Gentiles (Romans 1:18-32)**
- 2. The Judgers (Romans 2:1-16)**
- 3. The Jews (Romans 2:17-3:8)**
- 4. The Conclusion (Romans 3:9-20)**

A little over 20 years ago (February 19, 1995), I had the opportunity for the very first time to preach on a Sunday morning to a church. At that point in time, I had led many Bible studies and small groups, but never had an opportunity to preach before a church on a Sunday morning before.

And with that first opportunity, I chose a text that I knew well and that had made an impact in my life and that I thought was most crucial for our church to hear. My text? Romans, chapter 1, the very text that is before us this morning. Romans, chapter 1 and beginning in verse 18.

I think that I chose this passage to preach some 20 years ago because of its importance. It's one of the most foundational texts in all of the Bible. It presents to us a worldview that's important for all of us to grasp. It tells us that God has made himself known to everyone on the planet through creation, through conscience, and through Scripture.

And rather than responding to these things, we have rebelled. Every single one of us has rebelled. And our eternal condemnation is just. God has shown himself to us, and we have rejected him. We are rightly judged for our sin.

It's not education that our world needs, because God has made himself known to everyone. It's a change of heart that must take place. And that will only take place by God's grace.

Paul will bring out this truth in chapter 3 (and verse 24), where he says that we are "justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24). But, before Paul gets to the good news of our salvation, he begins with the bad news of our condemnation. My message this morning is entitled, "The Bad News."

The "Bad News," of course in to be contrasted with the "Good News." As you all know (if you have been here the last couple of weeks), Paul's letter to the Romans is all about "The Gospel." Literally, the word, "Gospel," means "good news." The book of Romans is all about "Good News." The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is "good news" for our souls, because, Jesus has provided the way to bring us to God. And that's good news.

But, the reality of the situation is that you can't really grasp the "good news" until you first grasp the "bad news." Consider the following illustration. Suppose I receive this text from my daughter:

"Dad, I arrived at Grandma and Grandpa's house. All is well."

Is that good news? You bet it's good news. But, you will never realize how good the good news is until you hear the bad news. Imagine the context in which I may have received this text.

It's a Saturday in February and my daughter, Hanna is playing volleyball deep in the suburbs of Chicago. And I text her: "Hanna, ... how's the volleyball tournament going?"

She replies, ...

"Good. We just finished. We won twice and lost twice. I'm coming home soon."

I text back:

"Be careful out there. There's a winter storm warning."

"OK. I'll be fine."

"Don't dally, because it's getting dark soon."

After an hour or so, I text, ...

"How's the drive home?"

"Slow."

"Be careful."

"I am."

Another hour passes, ...

"Hanna, how far are you?"

"Not very. I'm just getting on the toll-way. It's really bad. Only one lane is open."

Half-hour later, ...

"Any updates?"

"The wind is really strong. The roads are really icy. I'm going about 10 miles an hour."

I reply, "I'm praying."

"Thanks."

Five minutes later, I get the text, ...

"Dad!"

"Yeah!"

"I just slid off the road."

"Are you OK?"

"Yeah. What should I do?"

"Try calling a tow-truck."

"OK."

Thirty minutes later, she texts, ...

"The tow-trucks are all out. They said that they could get me in four hours."

Five minutes later, ...

"Also, I ran out of gas. I'm getting cold."

"Did you bring a coat?"

"No."

"Do you have a blanket in the car?"

"No."

"Mom and I are praying."

An hour later, ...

"Someone just stopped."

I reply, "Praise the Lord!"

Fifteen minutes later, ...

"I'm in his car. It's not a very nice car. His heat isn't working. I hope he doesn't get stuck. He's kind of creepy. I'm scared."

Half an hour later, ...

"We are near DeKalb. He says that he can drop me off at Grandma and Grandpa's house. I hope we can make it. I'm still scared."

I text back, ...

"We are really praying."

At two in the morning, I receive this text:

"Dad, I arrived at Grandma and Grandpa's house. All is well."

Now, is that good news? That's really good news! My daughter, who was in danger, is now safe and warm. Praise the Lord!

That's exactly what's taking place in our text this morning. Beginning in chapter 1 and verse 18, Paul paints the backdrop of the gospel as dark as it can be. His conclusion comes in chapter 3 and verse 10, ...

Romans 3:10-12  
as it is written,  
"None is righteous, no not one;  
no one understands  
no one seeks for God.  
All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;  
no one does good,  
not even one."

We all have sinned. None of us has done good. As a result, we stand guilty before the Lord.

Romans 3:19-20  
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. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

And then comes the "but" in chapter 3 and verse 21. It is a "blessed but." It's the "but" that changes our lives. Where on one hand, chapter 1:18, ...

Romans 1:18  
God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, ...

And on the other hand, chapter 3:21, ...

Romans 3:21-22  
But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, ... The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

And when you understand how dark the bad news is, you will then be able to understand how good the good news is.

Now, before we dig into verse 18, I want for us to grasp Paul's argument in chapters 1-3. It always helps to know where you are going.

This week, Yvonne and I went with Phil and Karen and Darryn and Maggie to a conference in Indianapolis, Indiana. It was a Biblical Counseling conference. As we were driving down, I asked Yvonne, what roads are we taking?

We dropped David off in DeKalb. Then she told me of the general plan. "We take I-88 to I-294 to I-80 to I-65 all the way into Indianapolis." And knowing the lay of the land helped me to look out for the exits that I needed to take.

And that's what I want to do this morning as we look at Romans 1-3. I want for us to get the lay of the land. So, let's begin with "The Bad News" for ...

## 1. The Gentiles (Romans 1:18-32)

The Gentiles are guilty. Now, a Gentile may stand before God and say this:

But Paul, it is not fair. How could God judge us? He never gave us a chance. We didn't have the Scriptures. We didn't hear about Jesus. We didn't know God's plan of salvation. Surely, God will not punish us.

But such an argument will not work. Because God has revealed himself to the Gentiles in Creation! "The Gentiles know God through creation." Look at Romans 1:18

Romans 1:18-20

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

In other words, God had revealed himself in the creation. In the sun and in the moon and in the stars. Listen to Psalm 19:1, ...

Psalm 19:1-2

The heavens declare the glory of God,  
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.  
Day to day pours out speech,  
and night to night reveals knowledge.

The creation speaks to all of its inhabitants, telling the world of a creator. As Isaac Watts wrote, "There's not a plant or flower below, but makes thy glories known," You can look to the skies. And you can look to the ground. And it all tells of the glory of God.

But sadly, our world has not turned to God. Look at verse 21, ...

Romans 1:21

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Though God has revealed himself to his creation, the creation has turned away from God. And so God lets us go.

Romans 1:24, 26, 28

Therefore God gave them up ...  
For this reason, God gave them up ...  
And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up.

He let the world go its own way. And the Gentile world rightly awaits the judgment of God.

In chapter 2, Paul makes a transition from the Gentiles to all (Jew or Gentile) who would judge themselves to be able to stand before God. And the "Bad News" for the ...

## 2. The Judgers (Romans 2:1-16)

... is that they are guilty.

Listen to their objection:

Paul, I agree with you. The Gentiles who reject God deserve to be judged. But we are not like that. We are not idolaters, homosexuals, murderers, or haters of God. We are faithful to our spouses, love our families. We are law-abiding people who care about others. Surely the wrath of God is not going to be revealed against us.

But, such an argument will not work before God. Look at verse 1, ...

Romans 2:1-3

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. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. 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?

This is the reality of many who walk the planet. They can rightly see the wrong in the lives of others. But they can hardly see the wrong in their own eyes. Jesus spoke of this on the Sermon on the Mount. He said, "Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?" (Matthew 7:3).

And just as God has made himself known in all of creation through the creation, so also has God given us all a moral compass. It is called our conscience.

We all know God through conscience—that inner voice that tells us what is right and what is wrong. All of us are aware of what is good and what is bad. Look down at verse 14, ...

Romans 2:14-16

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. 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 on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

People often depict our conscience as a little person sitting on our shoulder, instructing us on the way that we should go. And on the other shoulder is our sin, seeking to get us to do evil. And I'm sure that all of you know of the battle that rages in your head. Your conscience is telling you one thing, and your flesh is telling you another. Paul describes it here in verse 15 as our "conflicting thoughts." And too often we give in to our sin.

Paul knew the struggle.

Romans 7:14-20

For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

And when we stand before God, our conscience will stand as witness against us. This is the bad news: Though God has given us a conscience, we have still done what is wrong. And we will be judged by it. And none will escape.

Let's move on. Paul begins by describing the plight of the Gentiles. He continues with the plight of those who judge others. He finishes with ...

### **3. The Jews (Romans 2:17-3:8)**

And their objection goes like this.

But Paul, we are Jews! We are God's chosen people. God has entrusted to us his holy law and given to us the sign of circumcision. This proves that we are God's people. Surely he will never send his wrath on us.

Paul answers this objection beginning in chapter 2 and verse 17.

Romans 2:17-22

But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law; and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth—you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?

Paul gives a picture here of the man who knows the Bible and boasts in God. He has been instructed in the law. And he knows what God has revealed. He knows what is right and what is wrong!

The Jews know God through the Scripture. Paul's point here in chapter 2 is that the Jew fails in his living. He fails to live up to the righteous requirements of the law. Hear the indictment of verses 23 and 24.

Romans 2:23-24

You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

I know that you have seen this. You have seen professing Christians act anything like Christians. And when that happens, the name of God is blasphemed (verse 24).

This past Friday night, I went to see a high school football game. We have Christian friends from Oregon who were playing Rockford Lutheran. Jake plays on the J. V. team. Caleb plays on the Varsity team.

The J. V. game was great. The game went down to the wire, and Oregon won. As I stayed for the varsity game, Jake showered and came to join us in the crowd. It was very interesting to get his take on the game that he just played. But one thing really stuck in my mind. He told us of the profanity that spewed forth from the mouths of the Lutheran players.

Here they are, at a professing Christian organization, where a prayer was said before the game began. And the conduct of the players on the field was far from consistent with a Christian walk of faith.

Here's the difficult thing: the Mennen boys are trying to reach out to their teammates with the gospel of Christ. And the conduct of the players at a "Christian" school doesn't help. Verse 24 is very true:

Romans 2:24

The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.

When professing Christians live in willful and blatant and unrepentant sin, the name of God is blasphemed. No doubt, there are some God-fearing believing faculty at Rockford Lutheran. And this is intrinsically difficult with Christian schools.

The students aren't there by choice. Their parents have sent them there. They don't have to have a profession of faith to attend. Often, the faculty is trying to lead the student body in the ways of God. And just as often, it doesn't work out too well.

And as an aside, may I just say to you parents, don't kid yourself that things are fine, simply because you send your children to a Christian school. There may be more danger to the faith of your child at a Christian school than at a secular school.

Anyway, Paul reaches his conclusion in chapter 3 and verse 10. I have already read these verses, but they bear repeating.

Romans 3:10-12

as it is written,

"None is righteous, no not one;

no one understands

no one seeks for God.

All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;

no one does good,

not even one."

It matters not whether God has revealed himself in creation, or in conscience, or in the Scriptures. Because we all have rebelled against the knowledge of God. The Gentiles know God through creation. And they have rebelled. The Judges know God through conscience. And they have rebelled. The Jews know God through the Scripture. And they have rebelled. The conclusion?

Romans 3:19

The whole world [is] accountable to God.

And the reality is this: God is angry with the sin in this world. Look again at chapter 1 and verse 18.

Romans 1:18

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

Let us never lose sight of God's anger. In our day and age, there is much emphasis upon the love of God. God loves us. He loves us. Oh, how he loves us! And I'm thankful for the emphasis upon the love of God. Because it's God's kindness and forbearance and patience leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4). And it's God's love and grace toward us that brings us back to him in our failure. And it's God's love toward us that motivates our love to others.

But when it comes to God, we must not neglect the wrath of God. Because, his love only makes sense in light of his wrath. In fact, I would argue this: you cannot understand God's love apart from God's wrath

I do not believe that it is an accident that Paul begins his main theological argument with the wrath of God, and not the love of God. God's

love will come later--Oh how it will come!

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on October 9, 2016 by Steve Brandon.  
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