

Introduction & Recap

Chapter 1:

- greetings, and glory of gospel (vs.1-7)
- Paul's longing to serve church in Rome, to impart spiritual benefit (vs.8-17)
- begun to explore the terrible sinfulness of sin, and God's wrath against it (vs.18-32)

Chapter 2:

- the righteousness of God's judgement against sin (vs.1-16)
- for Jew and Gentile alike, no excuses and no exceptions (vs.17-29)
- *But that leaves a question: was God being unfaithful to his OT promises, covenants with Abraham etc?*
- and so Paul continues with his *diatribe*, his imagined debate...

Verses 1-8: God's Faithfulness

Verse 1:

- Or, as Paul asks the question - *what advantage is there in being a Jew?*
- or what is the point of circumcision, the defining entry point into Judaism?
- Does the Christian Gospel nullify, the whole of the OT revelation?
- many cults have said yes...
- many Jews who have rejected Christ cannot accept him as fulfilment of OT prophecy, and so view Christianity as sweeping away their faith

Verse 2:

- Paul's answer is that there is much value in being a Jew, in what circumcision stands for and points towards.
- First thing he picks out is their being *trusted with God's word*.
- Entrusted - given responsibility to carry, guard, obey, model, demonstrate, exemplify.
 - like relay runners with a baton - first three legs have to run, carrying the baton all the way, or the race cannot be won;
 - but equally, those first three legs on their own are not the whole thing - need the last leg, the anchor leg, Christ himself, to complete the course.
- *"The very words of God" - what a great privilege!!*
- Affirming OT as part of God's revelation
 - also reminding of privilege of bearing his word for others - now our privilege!
 - *so many of the privileges and advantages the Jews had, as we saw last week, we share now...* there is a warning here against doing what the Jews did and missing the Saviour in the midst of the religious observance...

Verse 3:

- OK, there is value in Judaism... so God is keeping his promises, he is still faithful.... *BUT...*
- What if some of the Jews didn't respond in faith? Doesn't that break the promises for everyone? Doesn't that end up making God out to be a liar?
 - for instance, what about the Exile - hadn't God promised that his people would inherit the land?
- How can God still be faithful when the Jew's unfaithfulness to their covenant relationship has kaiboshed the whole thing? (*cf when a Christian sins...*)

Verse 4:

- Paul's answer is that it doesn't nullify God's faithfulness:
 - *just points up individual responsibility*
- God will still be true, faithful, holy, just, etc, however we behave and however we treat his promises.
- Quotes a chunk from Psalm 51:4:
 - (51:3) *For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.*
 - (51:4) *Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.*

(51:5) *Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.*

- Our unfaithfulness almost shows up God's faithfulness more clearly!
 - like a grey shirt held up beside a white one reveals the whiteness of the white one more clearly!

Verse 5:

- That raises another **BUT** for Paul, another question in his little debate!
 - if our sin shows God's goodness up more clearly, doesn't that mean we should sin to make his glory greater?!?
 - **and so doesn't this mean that he is unjust in bringing wrath against us when we sin, because all we are doing is bringing him more glory????!!**
- (Note Paul's passing comment, "I am using a human argument.")
- Akin to saying "it's all down to God's strength, his initiative, so I'm not going to bother!" (eg evangelism, or social action, or preaching preparation, or ...)

Verse 6:

- Baloney!! That's essentially all Paul can say!
- If that were so, how could God be God and judge the world - whole revelation of who God is and how he operates falls apart at that point!
- God hates sin - he's not "in this" to make himself look good, he's in this because he is **holy**

Verse 7-8:

- **v.7** repeats argument of v.5 in a different form.
- **v.8** again, repeats the line in a different form:
 - such thinking is stupid, and more than that deserves condemnation **since it mis-represents God**
 - also note point about outsiders misrepresenting the faith - that still goes on today, and needs to be answered...
 - "Christians say this..." **or** "All Christians are..."
 - will come up wherever we are with people - eg in workplaces, home, friends, I get it in visits that I make, sometimes from from people who should know better!!
- **God reveals his glory out of evil DESPITE us, and would reveal even more of his glory if we obeyed and trusted him!**

Summary of vs.1-8:

- Paul presents a right view of OT/NT
- Paul presents a right view of how our behaviour brings glory to God
- Paul presents a right view of God's faithful uprightness

Verses 9-20: No-one Is Righteous

- So far we've looked at those who excused their sin by claiming it brought glory to God! **(they deserve only condemnation!)**
 - and at God's on-going faithfulness to all that he has promised
- Now we come to an exploration of **where that faithfulness**, or consistency to his promises in times past, **leaves us**.
 - **for God is also consistent to his promises to punish sin, as we shall see...**

Verse 9:

- In public speaking, oft repeated advice is: **Say what you want to say, say it, then say it again!!**
 - exactly what Paul does here!
 - **v.9** - says what he is going to say;
 - **v.10-18** - says it, in detail, exploring the background;
 - **v.19-20** - says it again, in summary!
- Essential point is that **we are no better off than those who made the bizarre claim that they were sinning to bring glory to God**
 - **we are all under sin, Jews and Gentiles alike, and face its ultimate consequence, the wrath of God Paul began to explore in chapter 1**

Verse 10

- v.9 simply boldly stated the case. Paul goes on to justify his statement by quoting a range of OT passages (about 8 of them)
 - (analogy: draw picture of sthg in middle, with series of arrows coming in to it...)
- Way he quotes is not quite our style:
 - we would tend to quote either word perfect, or just with references and put things in our own words - because we can go and check in a reliable translation, or assume that our hearers can too;
 - however, Paul quotes, from memory, relevant chunks, without saying where from; he has to assume that they will know!
- So v.10-12 is made up of phrases from 3 places - two Psalms that start the same way (cf. hymns that are very similar, except for tune?), and a verse from Ecclesiastes.
- Its in the putting them all together that the force of the OT witness that all stand condemned comes through.
- NO-ONE is righteous - thrust is absoluteness of that statement; not even one.

Verse 11

- That unrighteousness linked to lack of understanding, a blindness, a refusal to see
- This refusal to see is actually because of a refusal to get to know God; rejection of Him - "there is no-one who seeks God"
 - that is ultimately what sin is about - rejecting God, turning away from him, snubbing him, thumbing nose at the one who knows best, like petulant teenagers who know that their parents love them and know best, but still feel the need to rebel...
 - this "no-one who seeks God" is not the same as spiritual seeking, the remnants of a desire for God that leads people to explore spiritualities of various sorts, to ask questions about the meaning of life and so on
 - (remember that in his head he is writing about devout Jews, who indeed "sought God")
 - but they are not seeking God as he is, as he has revealed himself, as he offers himself to us in Jesus Christ - outside of the Holy Spirit's stirring of a soul towards God, these questions can only lead to a seeking of a God for themselves, their own idea of God...

Verse 12

- All have turned away: the language is of conscious choice; we all choose to ignore conscience, choose to go our own way, choose to be selfish, careless of others, whatever...
- Result is a loss of value - since our true value comes as we stand in God's presence.
 - as we give up our right to stand in his presence, turn away from him, we lose all value.
- Again, emphasis on universality of this condition.

Verse 13

- Series of vivid images:
 - throats - open graves - and its all about words - out of our mouths come words that lead to death;
 - words reflect inner person; deceit reflects flawed inner life, sin;
 - indeed, their words are like viper's poison, deadly, affecting all it comes into contact with.

Verse 14

- Words of cursing and bitterness are the kind of things that make up this poison that leads to death.

Verse 15

- Not just words. Actions, too, make up the full picture of sin and its consequences.
 - image of any kind of carelessness with the life or limbs of others; callousness;

turns to violence to solve problems.

Verse 16

- Consequence, even just in this life, is ruin and misery, both for their victims and ultimately themselves:
 - live by the sword, die by the sword.

Verse 17

- Flip side of that is that they do not know peace.
- This is perhaps one of the most striking things about our society:
 - most people lack peace.
 - lack inner strength, assurance of their own identity, security (not physical).
- People are valued only for their latest performance (footballers & other sports stars are just the most extreme example)
 - there can never be peace based on performance
- That fundamental sinfulness has robbed us of peace.

Verse 18

- Remember that Paul is piling up OT verses that really apply to all of us!
 - of ourselves, he finishes, we have no fear of God
- Fundamentally, our relationship with the universe is wrong because we don't, of ourselves, have a right relationship with the Lord and Creator of that universe.
- All of that is what the world is really like:
 - Christianity sees clearly, neither idealising nor writing off this world and its people.

Verse 19

- Another answer to a question arising in someone's mind - a Jewish mind, about to say: 'All true, Paul... for Gentiles, not Jews!'
- Paul's answer?
 - its 'the law' that has made that judgement (OT Scripture);
 - the law speaks most especially to those under the law (Jews);
 - and the law condemns that Jewish objectors actions; it is the very thing that convicts him!
- Indeed, the whole world is convicted - no-one able to raise any objection (silenced) to God's righteous judgement on mankind.

Verse 20

- Finally, Paul clarifies what the law actually does (and this whole business of what role God's law, rules & regs, guidelines for living, etc, plays in salvation we'll be coming back to over the coming weeks!):
 - you aren't able to say: "look, I've lived up to these standards, I'm OK" - the law doesn't justify;
 - rather, it makes you conscious of sin and falling short
 - stare long enough into the mirror of God's law and you will be (uncomfortably) reminded of how far short you fall of what he requires

Conclusion

- Paul has hammered his point home, hasn't he!
- **WE ARE SINNERS**
- Important: unless there is something to be saved from, then there is no point in preaching salvation.
- That's where we are at today - needing to make it clear to people that they are sinners - for folk just don't accept that they have a problem!