

If someone was to hand you a little white capsule, and say “Swallow this – It’s good for you.” ... You’d probably look sceptically at the capsule, say “Great, thanks.” And as soon as they weren’t looking, you’d poke it into the nearest pot-plant ...

But how different would it be, if before the gift of that little white capsule, your doctor said to you, “I’m terribly sorry to have to tell you this, but you have epoxy-nasal-conjestivitus (that’s a disease I made up – it’s Araldite up the nose), and in about 10 minutes, the congestion will harden and you won’t be able to breathe, and you will die.” But here is a cure for it, and if you take this tablet in the next 10 minutes, you’ll be cured....

*You’d probably be very happy to take the tablet, hey... To appreciate the **good** news of the cure, first we have to understand the **bad** news of the disease.*

And it’s the same with the Gospel.

To fully appreciate the **Good** News of the Gospel, first we have to understand the “**bad** news” – the terrible news – the awful news, of the very real trouble, we humans are in. And so in this section of Romans, Paul is relentless, in telling us all about the “**bad** news”. And so as I said last week, for the next few weeks, 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.

And so we began to hear last week, about the downwards spiral – both on a personal level, but more so on a society

level. And without Jesus in our lives, there is this downwards spiral, of godlessness and unrighteousness.

“Unrighteousness”, leads people turn their backs on God (they become godless, or turn to idols), and when they reject God, God hands them over to sin, and their unrighteousness increases. And so they reject God some more, and so they are plunged deeper into immorality. It’s a downwards spiral.

And we can see this, happening today, in our society. Our sin – our attitude toward God, has caused us (as a society) to reject God. And as our society, has become more and more “Godless”, it has become more and more morally corrupt, and bankrupt. So much so, that we don’t even recognise morality when we see it. *And an example of this, is the bill brought to the Qld Parliament this very week, by the Member for Cairns (Rob Pyne), asking our parliament to legalise abortion, with no limitations. He was proposing, that it’s OK to murder an unborn baby, right up until 9 monthsⁱ. By the way, many babies are born earlier than 9 months. The ACT, Victoria, and Tasmania, already have these laws in place. We have become so immoral as a society, we can’t even tell right from wrong any more.*

And all of this discussion (in Romans) of the “downwards spiral” is the explanation of why the Gospel is so precious.

Paul began with a series of statements, each explaining the other:

- 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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And **last** week, we spoke about “**why**” the wrath of God is being revealed – it’s because people have rejected God. But today, we’re going to be focussing more, on “**how**” the wrath of God is being revealed.

Have a look at the cartoon up on the screen....

That cartoon, is a humorous illustration, of how most people believe the wrath of God is expressed. We do something really bad – we commit this terrible sin, and God punishes us somehow. And here we have a Gary Larson cartoon, of God at his computer, and his finger is poised over the “smite” button, and this poor unsuspecting soul, is about to walk under a piano, suspended by a rope.

That’s how many of us might view “the wrath of God”. But I was actually a little surprised, as I studied this 1st chapter of Romans, **how** the wrath of God **is** being expressed today.

Our society, has rejected God. They’ve exchanged the truth about God for a lie. They worship and serve the creature, rather than the creator (humanism does that, by the way). And so the wrath of God, is this: **God gave them up. Three times**, it tells us:

- God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity
- to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves
- God gave them up, to dishonourable passions
- women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; (lesbianism; buggery)
- and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men (Alright, so he's describing homosexuality in all its forms)
- God gave them up to a debased mind (worthless mind) to do what ought **not** to be done.

Alright, most moralists, will look at Romans 1, and say, "There you go – homosexuality, attracts the wrath of God..." "Homosexuals are going to be punished for what they've done..."

But that's not actually the full story of what's being said here: **What's being punished, is the Godlessness of society**, and what it's saying, is homosexuality, getting a go-on in society – **is the wrath of God**. And not only homosexuality – God gave them up, to a debased mind.

What that means, is as unrighteousness increases, and as ungodliness increases, the people of society, will not even be able to comprehend, the difference between morality and immorality – between right and wrong – between good and evil – between vile and beautiful. The mind, gets so out of

touch with God and reality, that it cannot even comprehend, what is right, and what is wrong – that's what a debased mind is.

And so, this is a very timely bible reading for us. Romans Chapter 1, is describing a society, who in their thinking, have become so perverted, that they don't even know that men having sex with men, and women having sex with women, is wrong.

And here is something that we need to understand: This in itself, is the revelation of God's wrath.

- When we harden our hearts against God, God will make them even harder. That's what happened with Pharaoh – he hardened his heart against God, but God hardened it even more.
- And when a society, in its unrighteousness, turns its back on God, the wrath of God means he **increases** their unrighteousness.

And it increases, and increases, until we are totally debased. And Paul isn't finished yet. By the time we get through this section of Romans, every hint of self-righteousness we may feel, will be stripped away. We will realise that (without Christ) we are totally worthless – not even able to tell right from wrong – and our only hope, is in Jesus Christ the Saviour...

But I've skipped ahead, haven't I? I just love to preach the Good News, so I've skipped ahead, to give you a little bit of a glimpse – the dark tunnel **does** come to an end.... But we're not out of the tunnel yet.

When people reject God, God gives them up to a debased mind (worthless mind) to do what ought **not** to be done.

And you might've heard that and nodded your head, and agreed, "Yep, sexual immorality is running rampant – in all its forms. But it doesn't stop at sexual immorality. The finger you might find yourself pointing, may very well be pointing back at yourself, by the end of these next few verses:

V29 says: ²⁹ They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness...

Evil – I guess that means all kinds of wickedness

Greed or covetousness – That's striving to have more than we need, and its usually accompanied by depriving others, of what they **do** need

Malice or depravity – which means general badness...

And it goes on: **They are full of**

Envy – we know what envy is

- I wish I had her figure
- I wish I had his muscles
- How come he gets to drive a car like that, and I've got the bomb I've got?
- I **really want** a house like that...

Full of envy

Full of murder – Envy often leads to murder... The jealous husband, kills his wife in a rage; The armed robbery, leads to murder... The pregnant woman doesn't want to be tied to a child, and so she gets an abortion...

They are full of strife – alright, that's "conflict" – some people are very good at causing upset, wherever they go... If you don't believe me, just watch some brothers and sisters, when they niggle each other for a little while.

Full of deceit – that means to try and deceive someone – to try and trick them... (think dishonest used car salesman).

Full of maliciousness – that means someone's actions, might seem ok on the surface, but they're really conniving to do someone harm.

They are gossips. Talking about someone behind their back. – spreading confidential rumours about others. *And we all know, Christians don't gossip – they just share prayer requests...*

They are slanderers – Telling untruths, which defame someone's character.

They are haters of God – If you want an example of someone who hates God, you can look up any well-known atheists – someone like Richard Dawkins, who makes a living, writing books like "The God Delusion"... It's interesting, you know, the hatred that some people have for God, when they don't even believe He exists...

They are insolent – which means they are rude or arrogant, and show a lack of respect.

Haughty – means to be filled with pride.

Boastful - well, you know what that means – so filled with pride, you have to tell everybody about how good you are.

They are inventors of evil – Every day, new ways of doing evil, are being invented.

- Why does anybody create a computer virus, anyway? It doesn't do **them** any good – they just love inventing evil – they just love to disrupt society.
- Terrorists, build suicide bombs.
- They mail anthrax spores to government agencies.
- Sexting – wasn't around when I went to school.
- Internet porn.
- Designer drugs

All news ways of doing evil.

They are disobedient to parents – and many parents won't even discipline their kids when they **are** disobedient...

They are foolish – the Greek word actually means “unable to comprehend”. Because of their rejection of God, they simply cannot comprehend, the will of God.

They are faithless – that means “They don't keep their promises”. They'll break a treaty. They'll break a contract...

If they have to, they'll keep a contract to the letter of the law, but certainly not to the "spirit of its intent".

They are **heartless** – which means, they are without affection.

And **ruthless** – which means "You'd better not get in their way – they'll go right over the top of you." They are **hard**, and without compassion, or pity, or mercy...

Now, all of these (not attributes – what's the word?) deficiencies of character, are very common place in society. And these are **all** the unrighteousness, that is increasing in our world, as an expression of the wrath of God...

Now, I said to you, that by the time we get through this list, you might see that our pointing fingers, are pointing right back at ourselves. Because we've each had little hints of some of these in **our** lives, haven't we?

We may even be proud of having some of those characteristics...

- Yeah, a little bit of heartlessness and ruthlessness – "Yep, that's what makes a good manager..."
- Who of us, at some time, haven't stirred up a bit of strife?
- Or had a little bit of maliciousness, stored away in our hearts???
- Or shared a juicy piece of gossip?
- Even murder – by Jesus' standard, even if I'm angry with my brother, I've got murder in my heart...

So by now, we should be getting a little bit of the hint – that **none** of us **are** righteous...

But Paul hasn't stopped yet – there's more bad news to come:

Next, he tells us, that nobody, is in ignorance. None of us have an excuse. He tells us, that **they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die.**

It's not only Christians who know this. In fact, almost invariably, when I've had a discussion with an unbeliever, about homosexuality, even though they've **never read a Bible** in their life, they know that the Scriptures prescribe the death penalty for doing it. What they **don't** know, and **don't** understand, is that this was part of the laws for **Israel** to live by, in their land... But they **do** know that it's God's decree, that it deserves death....

*People generally, ... have some degree of awareness that the moral outrages they commit **are** wrong and [therefore] deserve to be punished by God.ⁱⁱ*

And it's not just homosexuality that deserves death:

- Being disobedient to parents
- Murderous hearts
- Inventing evil
- The list just goes on.... Eventually we'll read in 3:²³ for **all** have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and then in Chapter 6, For the wages of sin is death...

By the time we get through to there, we will understand, that **all of us** are guilty. Not one of us is righteous. We have all sinned, and deserve death.

Now, there's something very important here: It's not those who are **tempted** by these things, who deserve death: – It's those who **practice** them.

You may be tempted to covet; or tempted to gossip; or tempted to sexual immorality... But it's **giving in** to the temptation, that earns punishment.

And now we get to the **pinnacle** of the bad news – or perhaps to the very bottom of the manure heap – the very lowest of the low:

^{v32} Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

Having a personal temptation that you struggle with and battle with, and perhaps give in to, is bad enough, but **worse** than that – **the lowest of the low** – Is when one can make a detached, impersonal judgment, and give their approval, to those who practice these things...

There is nothing, more repulsive to our God, than to be so godless and so depraved, that one would give their approval to those who live out all of the immorality and perversions, of a world gone down the gurgler...

Friends, we're at this point in Australia right now.

Right now, in the Federal election campaign, the issue of "Same-sex marriage", is front-and-centre, for the people of Australia. Currently, marriage is for a man and woman to come together, in union, as one flesh. But of course, there are those who want to re-define what marriage is. And so there has been a whole bunch of same-sex marriage bills before our parliaments...

And in this election campaign, the leader of the coalition (Malcolm Turnbull), has made it very clear, that he's all for "same-sex marriage". And he's promised, that if the coalition get into the government, he will hold a plebiscite (that means that in an election-like setting, people will be able to cast their vote as to whether they want it or not. And then the government can decide what they want to do about it).

The Labour Party however, have said "that's one of the first things we'll do, when we get into government" – they'll re-write the marriage act, so that men can marry men, and women can marry women. They've also said, "Regardless of what the Australian people say in the Plebiscite, as soon as we re-gain control of the Parliament, it'll be in."

The Greens, of course, would've done it years ago.

Now, with all of this going on, there is something else, which prevents us from discussing it openly, and honestly. Every state in Australia, have anti-discrimination acts of various types. And the Christian lobby have asked for those anti-

discrimination acts to be suspended, for the duration of the discussion, in the lead-up to the plebiscite. (so that free speech can be had)

Last week, the Attorney-General (George Brandis), indicated that that won't happen.ⁱⁱⁱ

Which is a bit of a problem, *because when the Roman Catholic Arch Bishop of Hobart, put out a pamphlet, promoting the traditional view of marriage between a man and a woman, same-sex advocates reported him to the human rights commission, and they have since ruled, that he has a case to answer to^{iv}. And it was only last week, that the Anti-discrimination Commissioner decided not to proceed with the case, because the complainant withdrew her complaint.^v But if that complaint hadn't been withdrawn, the Bishop would have had to answer to the Anti-discrimination Commission.*

I sort of suspect, that if an activist took exception to this message today, I could find myself before the courts, just like the Roman Catholic Arch Bishop was.

But my first allegiance, is to God. And if I am going to preach on Romans chapter 1, then my job as a preacher, is to be completely open and honest, with what the Scriptures are telling us.

At a time such as this, the church must boldly speak out, and speak God's truth, into this debate.... I doubt we'll be listened to, but we must not shy away from it...

And the cost can be high. It can be **very** high. At about this point, I think I need to share with you, a bit of a personal experience of mine. If I don't, it's going to be like talking around it, and it's going to be like there's a big old elephant-in-the-room, we're trying to skirt around it, and not mention that it's there.

Right now, is when the community are talking about it, and the church needs to be very clear, about what marriage is. But also we need to be very clear, that homosexual sex, is not normal, it is not good, and it is a sign, of God's wrath on the world (it's not the **only** sign – but it is **a** sign)... And this is where it gets personal for me.

We already heard, that **the lowest of the low** – is when one can make a detached, impersonal judgment, and give their approval, to those who practice these things... That's the lowest of the low – It is the ultimate state of fallen-ness – to say to someone who has fallen into a sin, or who is questioning if it is a sin, “Don't worry about it. It's all good. You keep doing it.”

It's almost 3 years now, since the Lord said to me, “It's time for this church in St George, to get out of the denomination it's in. The time for preaching has finished. The time for judgment is here. Get out.”... I had struggled with the position of that denomination, for a long time.

- It had already decided that there was no problem with a minister being a practising homosexual.

- Much of its teaching was that if you're tempted with homosexuality, well that's how God has made you, and you should celebrate it...
- There was a push (even at youth events), to normalise the homosexual lifestyle.

But the Scriptures were telling me, “No, this is **not** how God has made you. This is bad. This is God's wrath in society, for being so godless. It's not good for you. It's not good for society. It's a path that can only lead to death.” V27 says that **they receive in themselves the due penalty for their error**. Did you know *LGB (Lesbian, Gay and Bi-sexual) youth are 4 times more likely to attempt suicide than those with a normal sexuality*^{vi}. It is **not** the good life-style that it's made out to be. And they need our love. They need to be restored, by a loving Saviour, who can **heal** their brokenness... They don't need to be affirmed – they need to be led, to a better path.

And yet the denomination I was in, had increasingly shifted, to approving – “This is how God has made you. Celebrate it.”

When I left that denomination (and some of you have too), they were just beginning a discussion, on whether or not the church should marry same-sex couples. That's 3 years ago, and they still haven't decided. They've put out discussion papers, which to me seemed to be skewed towards the same-sex argument. They've sought input from the councils of the church (which they generally have a history of ignoring)...

At the last assembly, it was decided **not** to re-affirm their current position of marriage between a man and a woman.

And nor did they voice a rejection of covenants for same-gender unions^{vii} (which are very much like a wedding ceremony, and some ministers are already doing them).

How far, has our world fallen, for a church to give approval, to such unrighteousness – for them even to discuss, “Is this OK? Or is it not?” To give one’s approval, is the very **worst** expression of the wrath of God. And it was being revealed, in the church I was in.

For me, I realised I had a choice to make, between convenience or conviction. It would have been very convenient for me to stay in that denomination. I had secure employment; I had a home; I had wonderful friends; The church was growing – it had grown from being one of the smallest in town, to being the biggest in town; it had all the children’s and youth programs you could hope for... It would have been very convenient to stay there.

But for me, it was a matter of conviction. Was I going to continue in a church, who were so godless, that it had become an expression of the wrath of God??? Yeah, my friends were there. It had great facilities, and wonderful programs... It had the man-power, and it was growing... But it was a matter of convenience vs. conviction...

And which do you think God cares about? Do you think God is looking for a people who value “convenience”? Or is He building a people of “conviction”? And I know a lot of you are in this church, because you’re convicted, “This is where God wants me”.... It’s certainly not convenient, being part of a church plant – there’s a lot of jolly hard work... But isn’t it great to honour God, with our convictions?

In the wrath of God, He has given our society, and even church leadership, over to a debased mind – a worthless mind – an inability to tell right from wrong.

But remember, The Gospel, is the Power of God to save.

I'm really looking forward to Romans 12:2, when we will hear about how the Holy Spirit **renews** our mind. But we've still got a couple of weeks of bad news yet... Don't despair. We'll get there.

Questions?

ⁱ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-05-10/queensland-abortion-bill-to-be-introduced-by-rob-pyne/7399368>

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

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.sbs.com.au/topics/sexuality/article/2016/05/06/anti-discrimination-laws-unlikely-be-suspended-plebiscite>

^{iv} <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-11-13/catholic-church-has-discrimination-case-to-answer/6939942>

^v <http://www.themercury.com.au/news/tasmania/transgender-rights-activist-martine-delaney-drops-complaint-over-catholic-churchs-marriage-booklet/news-story/d8d9079bf932526b27e5f094e57dbe84>

^{vi} <http://www.thetrevorproject.org/pages/facts-about-suicide>

^{vii} <http://www.confessingcongregations.com/news-views/item/report-on-marriage-discussion-at-the-14th-assembly/>