

**Right living**

**Sermon 4**

**Romans 2:1 – 3:8**

**“The challenge of righteousness”**

[SLIDE 1]

So, 6, nil!

Good morning, and welcome.

4<sup>th</sup> sermon of “Right living”. Romans 2:1 – 3:8

Summarise week (60 hrs 4 days, 3am, wedding, Ted and dierdrie, left to come here!)

*Ask a few people:*

- 1 **How has your week been?**
- 2 **Have you been holy this week?**

Jesus said “be holy as I am holy”.

And yet, we, his followers cannot say, “Amen Lord, I have been holy this week!”

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If you have believed Jesus is the Son of God in your heart and confessed it with you tongue you are born again, of the spirit, a child of God.

The children of God receive God’s love poured into their hearts by the holy spirit. So we know, as the spirit testifies to us, that God is our Father in Heaven. May he be forever praised!

In his glory, God is no ordinary Father, he is the best of Fathers. He is constantly at work for the good of his children. He blesses his children with his love and every good thing.

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***Mohotso. How would you feel if you found Solomon smoking marijuana?***

**A good father, who loves his children, cannot applaud them and bless them when they do things that hurt them. Like any good father, God disciplines his children.**

**[SLIDE 2]**

**It has always been this way. See here in the Old Testament:**

**“Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you.”**

**The writer of the letter to the Hebrews breaks it down:**

**What son is not disciplined by his father?**

**If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.**

**Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live!**

**Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.**

**No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”**

**Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.**

**In today’s scripture, Romans 2:1 to 3:8, God challenges the way we live. It is not touchy feely, it is not a pat on the back, it is not a group hug.**

**It is a challenge. If we are wise, we will be open to the discipline in God’s word. God disciplines his children. His discipline is for our good, that we may share in his holiness.**

**The discipline God wants to bring today, may not seem pleasant today. It may challenge the way we live in a painful way. But, if we accept his discipline and let our hearts and lives be changed by it, then, later, when we have been through the painful process of changing our lives, we will enjoy a harvest of righteousness and peace.**

**Let us pray!**

**(love us, love enough to discipline, open to it, challenge & change)**

Last week our sadly departed brother Stuart [departed to Geneva, not heaven, though I think they are similar] gave us the headline of the book of Romans. The key to Right Living. What was it?

*[Yeah, sort of]*

[SLIDE 3] ALL READ

The headline of the book of Romans and key to right living is that in the gospel, that means the good news concerning Christ's resurrection, is the power of God to save all who believe.

Why? Because it is through FAITH in the gospel that the RIGHTEOUS will have LIFE. Alleluja

Note, that it is the RIGHTEOUS that will have life, through faith.

Can this be right? It is pretty clear that we are not righteous. Scripture itself, declares "not one is righteous, not even one"!

The answer, of course, is also in the gospel. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last.

Ah ha!

The news about Christ's resurrection is good because through faith in it we are able to become righteous. The gospel message is that God is offering righteousness to us. And how do we get it? By faith from first to last.

We first get righteousness from God by faith in Christ's resurrection and we grow in righteousness by faith in Christ's resurrection until, at last, we shall be as righteous as Christ, by faith in Christ's resurrection.

Only those who are righteous like God can share eternity with God. We attain the righteousness we need for eternal life, through faith, from first to last.

Paul quotes the prophet Habbakuk (Habbakuk 2:4)

"The RIGHTEOUS shall LIVE by FAITH"

Habbakuk foretold it and it has always been this way. Be alive to the message of the book of Romans and God will explain this to you. Paul explains in later chapters how God's people, Abraham, David, Joseph and the Prophets attained life through their faith in God.

**BY FAITH WE BECOME RIGHTEOUS.**

**BY FAITH THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL LIVE, NOW, AND FOREVER.**

Praise be to our gracious God who has given himself that we might live forever by faith alone.

What great news! God has made an amazing offer to his World and confirmed his authority to make this offer by raising Jesus from death to life, as the firstborn of many brothers.

Allelujah, for the whole world has accepted this gracious and amazing offer with the humility and joyful celebration it deserves...

or not.

In fact, the opposite has happened, as Stuart explained last week. Although God's invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clear to the World since the beginning, being stamped into the creation in which we live, mankind has rejected God.

Mankind has shut its eyes to what is knowable about God from the World around us, it has chosen to believe lies and follow its own desires instead of the good ways of God.

So, God has left those that reject him to their own way, and what a mess they are in...

**[SLIDE FOUR]**

**Romans, chapter one, verses 29 to 32, (the end of last week's passage):**

**"They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless.**

**Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them."**

**Such is the condition of our world. This is where Stuart left us. In a mire.**

**What do you think about the people that live like this?**

**PAUSE**

**[SLIDE FIVE]**

**Perhaps, you think they deserve hell and damnation?**

**[SLIDE SIX]**

**PAUSE**

**[SLIDE SEVEN]**

**How can you judge them? You are just as bad! And you have no excuse! You profess to know God, you study his word and attend his church. And yet, you do the same things!**

**If you judge others for doing evil, in the same moment, you are condemning yourself.**

**Judge and be condemned in the same way!**

**This is Paul's first challenge to us today: JUDGE NOT.**

**Jesus would agree.**

**[SLIDE EIGHT]**

**In his sermon on the mount, Matthew 7: 1-2, Jesus declared:**

**"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." (Matthew 7: 1-2)**

**What is Paul's first challenge for today?**

**[DO NOT JUDGE]**

**PAUSE**

**[SLIDE NINE]**

**Paul does not just challenge us. He gives good reason for his challenge.**

**[SLIDE TEN]**

**“Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere man, 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, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance? 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 give to each person according to what he has done."**

**God knows the secrets of all our hearts. He understands us better than we understand ourselves. God knows the truth. So, God's judgement of mankind is based on truth.**

**So, when you judge others but do the same things will you escape God's judgement?**

**We all deserve to be destroyed. But, in his grace, God has allowed us time to live on earth, and he has revealed himself to us. How do we use that time? If we judge others “we show contempt for God's amazing kindness, tolerance and patience with us”. We fail to realise that it's the realisation of God's kindness to us that leads us to repent, and we carry on judging others.**

**SAY AGAIN: it's the realisation of God's kindness to us that leads us to repent**

### **EG. AMAZING GRACE**

**So, because we use God's patience to judge rather than repent, we are storing up wrath against ourselves for the day of God's wrath. The day when God's righteous judgement of mankind will be made known.**

**GOD WILL GIVE TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO WHAT HE HAS DONE.**

**Paul adds a further ground to his challenge not to judge in a later section of today's text.**

**Lets skip ahead to look at Verses 17 to 24.**

**[SLIDE ELEVEN]**

**Paul is talking about Jews in these verses but, if we are wise, we will see that much of his words apply to us. As you will see, later in today's passage, and more expansively later in the book, we are True Jews. So, hear Christian for Jew, and listen good:**

**“Now, you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to 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 infants, 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 brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? As it is written: "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."**

**Clearly, the bit about the law does not apply to us, because we were not given the law, nor are we under it. However, do you know anyone who professes “to know God’s will, to know what is right (superior), to be a guide for those who don’t see the right way (the blind), to be a light for those in the dark, an instructor of the foolish and a teacher of infants”?**

**If I am honest, it sounds like me. Especially, given I am currently teaching. Does it sound like you. Is that how you see yourself. Would your friends outside the church say that is how you saw yourself. I think mine would.**

**Well then, Paul asks, you who teach others, do you not teach yourself?**

**You preach against taking stationery from work, does the odd pen find its way home? You say people should not watch porn, do you google the odd “sexy beauty”? You abhor the worship of Pop Idols, do you not pour over Heat magazine when you get a chance? You brag about your knowledge of what is right (the law), do you dishonour God by breaking the law?**

**Let us humble our hearts and honestly consider whether Paul’s indictment applies to us: “As was written long ago concerning the Jews, so it is: “God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.””**

**Perhaps, sometimes, you find you really want to tell people about the glory of God but you spend much of your time in hypocritical judgement of others, and so GOD’S NAME IS BLASPHEMED BECAUSE OF YOU.**

**We know how God’s church is tarnished by the hypocrisy of its members. We read it in the news every day (eg rapist). But it is not just the bad guys, we do it too. We commit the same sin that caused God to reject the Jews. Do we want their rejection, do we want to be the cause of blaspheming. Of course not. Then lets get serious. Lets each take responsibility for carving hypocrisy out of our lives. If we can’t do right, then lets not judge and preach. For we do more harm than good.**

**What is Paul’s first challenge, for today?**

**[DO NOT JUDGE!]**

**[SLIDE TWELVE]**

So, judging is the wrong way to live. Then, what is the right way Mr Paul?

[SLIDE THIRTEEN]

“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.”

Is it difficult to understand Paul? I do not think so. It may be difficult to live in the right way Paul describes but it is not difficult to understand.

“To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honour and immortality, he will give eternal life.”

What does persist mean?

Time for the OED I think. This is good...

Our marvelous Oxford English Dictionary outdoes itself in this definition, I feel.

[SLIDE FOURTEEN]

Persist means

*intr.* (?) To continue firmly or obstinately in a state, opinion, purpose, or course of action, **esp. (! I think v applicable)** despite opposition, setback, or failure. Usu. with in. Also (now rare) *trans.* with infinitive as object. **(! I think v applicable)**

Truly, to those with a bible, and an OED, all the riches of the wisdom of heaven are available!

Lets combine the two:

[SLIDE FIFTEEN]

If you continue firmly, or obstinately, to do good, despite opposition, setback, or failure, and you continue in this way forever, God will give you immortality, honour and glory!

Hallelujah! Praise be to God!

**So, lets be clear, you don't have to be good. Jesus said to his disciples "Why do you call me good, only the Father is good". Wo! Jesus was not perfectly good. We are going to struggle to be good then. But God is not asking us to be good he is asking us to persist in doing good. To keep on doing good and seeking to grow in goodness forever, whatever the cost. {JR?}**

**"But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger."**

**We have heard this indictment before. For everyone except [POINT TO TOP SENTENCE] these chaps there will be wrath and anger. For everyone, except these chaps is, by definition of rejecting God and his ways, rejecting the truth and following evil.**

**What is new, is Paul's description of such people. He calls them "self-seekers". Jesus said that to fulfil the law we must love others and God as we love ourselves. Hence, when we seek our own interests, we break the righteous law of God. A good summary of Right Living is to love others and God as yourself. In time, and after painful opposition, setback, and failure, we will become other-seekers rather than self-seekers. It can be difficult to remember all the principles of the bible so lets use Jesus' summary and remember it constantly. We are to love others and God as if they were ourself.**

**"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." Here Paul applies what we have learnt to the Jews. I'll leave you to meditate on it later as I think we need to move on.**

**Can we go to: verses 12-16**

**[SLIDE SIXTEEN]**

**"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, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.) This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares."**

**I want us to be clear on another thing. Faith is not enough on its own.**

**You believe in God? Well done. Even the demons believe that, and shudder when they think of it. Being like a demon is not our calling. Faith is the key to righteousness and it is to the righteous that immortality is given.**

**Look at verse 13, Paul confirms what I am saying.**

**“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.”**

**As we have learnt, to those who by persistence in doing good seek immortality, God will give eternal life. The righteous will live by faith!**

**Check verses 14 and 15:**

**“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, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.”**

**Woah! This is deep.**

**Paul explains that, though we will not be judged according to Jewish law (verse 12), the law is still relevant to us. Because, when we do the things required by Jewish law we should the principles of Jewish Law are written on our hearts.**

**Deep enough. Paul goes deeper.**

**Since we show that the requirements of Jewish Law are written on our hearts, our consciences bear witness that we do right. In other words, when we do right, we show that God's law is written on our hearts. And then, our consciences tell us (bear witness) when do wrong (when we break the law.**

**Even though it was the Jews that were given God's law, it has now been written on our hearts. And our consciences accuse us when we break it.**

**You know the truth of this.**

**And still, Paul goes deeper..**

He observes that our consciences don't only accuse us. They also defend us. They encourage us when we are doing right and give us peace. They say, amen, you are doing right! Doesn't that feel good. Yes, of course. And we should listen to the encouragement and accusations of our conscience and keep doing the good they love.

(Verse 13) It is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.

(16) This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ.

What does your conscience say? Do you live right or wrong. Do you want to tell everyone? No. Well, consider the day when God will judge all men's secrets, through Jesus Christ.

What is Paul's second challenge for today?

**PERSIST IN DOING GOOD!**

[SLIDE SEVENTEEN]

What does Paul say to the Jews about all this?

[SLIDE EIGHTEEN]

Verses 25 to 29 and 1 to 3 of chapter 3

Paul uses the example of the Jewish ritual of circumcision to explain the right way to live.

“Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. 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 lawbreaker.”

Circumcision, the ritual, has value if you observe the law. But if you break the law you are as if you had not carried out the ritual. If those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised?

Lets be clear. Paul says the ritual has value. Going to church is an example of a ritual. Here, Paul says our rituals have value. But, Paul asks, rhetorically, what value there is in going to church if you still break God's law. This sounds patronisingly obvious. Why then, have so many missed the point? Why do so many people think attending church has value even if they break God's law?

**And, Paul asks, what about those who keep God's law without doing the ritual. Of, for instance, going to church. Paul suggests God will regard them as though they had been to church. And what is worse for churchgoers is, Paul says, that those who keep God's law without going to church and studying the word will condemn churchgoers who break the law. Think on this. Be convicted by it.**

**Verses 28 and 29 and 1 to 3 of chapter 3:**

**"A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God."**

**A true Jew, a true follower of Jesus, a true child of God, is not only one outwardly. To be a Christian is not a new name for yourself. It is a change of your heart.**

**In the same way that true circumcision is a circumcision of the heart, rather than the, you know what. True religious ritual means a changing the heart by the spirit.**

**Paul explains, as we preach in this church, that this change takes place by the power of the spirit not by following a written code.**

**My time's nearly up. I'll finish with Paul's question in verse 1 of chapter 3:**

**"What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God."**

**Some might say, if you are saying that what matters is a circumcised heart then what advantage is there of being a Christian and what value in coming to church. Do not be misled. As Paul says, there is MUCH advantage in being a Christian and coming to church, MUCH IN EVERY WAY.**

**So, what are the challenges of today's passage?**

**Come on help me out**

**[SLIDE 19]**

**Two challenges of righteousness:**

- 1 DO NOT JUDGE**
- 2 PERSIST IN DOING GOOD**

**Great, good challenges you say, now really, it is time for lunch.**

**Please. Do not miss these challenges. Take them to you heart, meditate on them, carry them with you all week. Let God speak to you through them and about them. Let God clear up any uncertainties you may have.**

**Why, what is the point. The point is that EVERYTHING rests on your reaction. If you react to these challenges as God has encouraged you to you will avoid condemnation, you will stop people blaspheming God because of you, you will enjoy a harvest of righteousness and peace and in the end God will crown you with honour, glory and eternal life.**

**All this is promised to those who respond as God has asked us all to do today, through Paul's words. God is not like a man that he should lie, he keeps all his promises. Will you trust God's promise?**

**Trust is what you need to respond to these challenges in the way God has asked. Remember the headline verse and key to the message of Romans. The righteous shall live by faith.**

**Do not give up on God's promises because you don't trust yourself to do what he asks. It is true that on your own you cannot do what God has asked. God does not expect you to.**

**Remember that, as Paul concluded today's passage, it is by the Spirit that the heart is changed not by a written Code. We are still just setting out into the journey of faith that is the book of Romans. God has much more to say. Much more to help us like right. But we are ready for that, excited by it, and taking the first steps.**

**God has promised to help, and made that help available to all who accept it with faith. Will you?**