

Anglican Church Noosa
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Romans 2:1-3:20 - From Grace to Glory
Week 2 - The Universal Need
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I think it's a pretty universal trait, that we love to judge other people. We watch the news, scroll through social media, or look at our neighbours, and we think, "I would never do that."

Last week we saw in Romans chapter 1, that Paul painted a vivid picture of a world in rebellion against God. He described a culture that abandoned God, resulting in chaos, greed, envy, and deceit.

It is easy for religious, moral, or "good" people to read Romans 1, nod their heads, and say, "Yes! Those wicked people out there deserve God's judgement."

Chris described it last week in his sermon as humanity's blind spot. And he said, 'blind spots cause accidents'!

But today, step into Romans 2, and Paul takes away the blind spot by giving us a mirror.

He looks at the moralist, he looks at the religious person, he looks at the good citizen, and he gives us the verdict: You are just like them.

Today, we're exploring Romans 2:1 to 3:20 and our topic is: The Universal Need.

We heard three portions of this passage, but we're going to cover all of it today.

So **please**, have your Bibles open to Romans 2 and 3, on page 1127 in the pew bibles.

Now I think I need to give a content warning, because I have a fear, that at the end of this sermon you're going to be feeling pretty miserable.

Now that's not my goal, and it's certainly not Paul's goal.

His goal is to break down false confidence, so we can see our desperate, equal need for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In vv. 1-16 of chapter 2, Paul begins by addressing the person who thinks their good behaviour exempts them from God's judgement.

v.1 of chapter 2 "You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgement on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgement do the same things." (Romans 2:1)

We are experts at judging others by their actions, while we judge ourselves by our intentions.

Maybe we excuse our own anger as "stress," but label someone else's anger as "toxic."

Paul exposes this hypocrisy.

If you know right from wrong well enough to judge your neighbour, you have proven that you understand God's moral standard. So, when you break that same standard, you have no excuse.

Paul tells us that God's judgement is entirely different from human judgement.

Firstly, God judges according to truth. Look at v.2

He sees past our public reputation and goes directly into our private reality.

Secondly, God judges according to actions. Look at v.6

He judges based on what we actually do, not what we intend or even pretend to do.

Thirdly, God judges without partiality. Look at v.11

He doesn't have favourites. Our circumstances or our background don't come into play.

Paul raises a really crucial question in v.4: "Do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realising that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?"

When our lives are going well, it's easy to assume that God is pleased with us. But Paul says no. If you are breathing today, and you have not faced the immediate consequences of your sin, it is not because you are good. It is because God is patient.

So when our life is going well, it's not a reward; blessings are an invitation to repent.

In the second half of chapter 2, Paul shifts his focus specifically to the Jewish people.

They had two massive points of pride: they had the Law of God, and they carried the physical sign of the covenant, which was circumcision.

And they believed these two things made them immune from judgement. Well, Paul takes all of that apart.

You see, knowledge isn't the same as obedience.

He says -

"17 Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and boast in God; 18 if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; 19 if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, 20 an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of little children, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and trust — 21 you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? 22 You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? 23 You who boast in the law, do you dishonour God by breaking the law? 24 As it is written: "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you." (Romans 2:17-24)

It is easy to think that knowing the truth equates to living the truth.

The religious crowd knew the Ten Commandments by heart. Yet, Paul tells them directly: You know this but look what you're doing.

We need to look closely at ourselves - For Paul to say to them, God's name is blasphemed because of you, is a hard truth.

As we reflect on recent times, there have been many, too many, Christians, church leaders, ministers, who have 'fallen from grace' and by those actions have disgraced God and His church.

We've had the scandal of child sexual abuse within the church. That is a horror.

The clear evidence of domestic abuse, coercive control, intimidation, within Christian households, is a horror, and disgraces God and his church.

Possessing the Bible does not save anyone. Preaching the gospel does not save anyone.

Going to church, knowing theology, even being able to spot false teaching in others, does not change a human heart, does not save us.

Paul says, that when religious people live hypocritically, it causes the secular world to blaspheme God (v. 24).

Lord, have mercy.

Paul then addresses circumcision, which is the ultimate cultural marker of identity for Israelites. But Paul explains that a physical ritual is only valuable if the internal reality matches it.

In verses 28-29 he says "*A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code.*" (Romans 2:28–29)

God has never been satisfied with external compliance. He doesn't look at church attendance, baptism certificates, or family heritage. He looks at the heart.

An unbaptised, uneducated person who loves God from the heart is closer to Him than a religious leader whose heart is cold and self-righteous.

As we move into chapter 3, Paul anticipates the objections.

People might ask, "If being religious doesn't save you, is there any advantage to it at all?" Paul answers: Yes, much in every way!

That community was trusted with the very words of God (3:2).

Having the Bible is a massive blessing because it tells us the truth about God and ourselves. But having the Bible does not make you a better human being. To prove this, Paul brings his argument to a huge, sobering climax.

He becomes like a prosecutor in a global courtroom, and brings a charge against all of humanity.

In 3:10–18, Paul quotes a series of Old Testament scriptures (mainly from the Psalms and Isaiah) to diagnose the human condition.

Look at how absolute this language is:

*"There is no one righteous, not even one;
there is no one who understands;
there is no one who seeks God.
All have turned away,
they have together become worthless;
there is no one who does good, not even one."* (Romans 3:10–12)

"When Paul says 'there is no one righteous,' that anchors what we confess together every Sunday:

Every week we pray a confession together. As Anglicans we do that because we know it articulates our reality before a holy God. We're not exaggerating anything, it's a sober reality.

Look at how Paul outlines it here in these verses ...

He talks about our **minds** - "*No one understands.*"
Our thinking is darkened by self-interest.

And then he goes from our minds to our **desires**: "*No one seeks God.*"
Left to ourselves, we want God's blessings, but how much do we want God Himself.

and then he moves on to our **speech**: "*Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit.*" (v. 13).
Our words cut people down, we lie, we hurt.

He talks about our **actions**: "*Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways.*" (v. 15–16).
Humanity's history is a history of conflict, isn't it. None of us are immune.

This is kind of like an Xray, getting to the heart of the problem. It applies to everyone - the criminal in jail, and the philanthropist who wins awards.

And the nice Christians who help their neighbour.

But the reality is, that apart from the grace of God, we are all profoundly, radically broken.

Paul finishes this section with the verdict in vv 19 & 20:

"Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin."

The purpose of God's law—His moral standard—is not to be a ladder that we climb to reach heaven. The law is a mirror.

If your face is dirty, you do not grab the mirror and try to scrape the dirt off it, do you?
The mirror can only show you the dirt.

You see, the law shows us our sin, but it cannot save us from it.
It leaves everyone, the whole world, standing before God with nothing to say in our own defence.

This is a heavy place to be, as we come to a conclusion. Every mouth silenced. The whole world guilty.

But it's important to understand why Paul spends two chapters driving this point home.

You cannot appreciate the cure, if you don't accept the diagnosis.

If you think you are mostly good, you will likely see Jesus as a helpful life coach or an inspiring example.

But really, it's only when you realise your spiritual need, that will you see Jesus as the necessary Saviour.

Paul leaves us at the end of Romans 3:20 standing in the dark, completely exposed, with our self-righteousness shattered.

But he does this so that we will look up.

Because next week, in verse 21, the two most beautiful words in the New Testament appear:

"But now..."

Paul goes on to explain that a righteousness from God apart from the law has been made known through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

The universal need demands a universal Saviour.

Jesus lived the perfect life we failed to live.

On the cross, he took the judgement our hypocrisy deserved.

Our performance cannot save us, but **His** performance can.

Let's drop our pride, let's stop comparing ourselves to others, and bring our empty hands to the only One who can make us clean.

Amen.