

# Sermon Transcription • Romans 2:1-11 (ESV)

# **Bad News for Good People**

#### Pastor Jeff Bucknam

[Please Note: This transcript has been lightly edited for ease of reading. Also, some headings have been added in square brackets to aid the reader in locating portions of the sermon.]

I think that if you go around our society today and you asked people the question; describe the human race in a few categories morally speaking - I mean how would you divide people out regarding good or bad or whatever. Like most people in the Western world anyway, and in our community locally, have in their minds a certain breakdown, okay. Here's the way I think it works. I think that there's a whole, that there's at the top shelf, there is a group of great moral people in the world right. And whenever we think about that, we always think about the same person, it's Mother - Mama T, right and she's at the top, she's great, right, morally great. People like her, people who win the Nobel Peace Prize. Sometimes your friends, sometimes a husband will say, "My wife, is so morally great, she's just at the very top, she didn't do anything wrong." No, I don't know any husbands who say that, but anyway I know that there's probably someone out there; the morally great. And then at the other end of the spectrum we would say there's the morally gross. And there's a name that we always use for the morally gross, and it's Hitler, right. Stalin, Hitler, Donald Trump now apparently, or if you don't like him, Hillary Clinton. So there's always a person, that neighbour of yours who you are so angry at, there's this gross group. And we all say these people do such wicked things that they deserve some level of condemnation. Rightly so, I mean HItler of course killed millions of Jews, Stalin killed millions and millions of Russian compatriots. We've people throughout history, I mean, how can Trump say those things? "He should be rightly condemned," we say. And people like Mother Teresa, they should be rightly praised. But most of humanity in our minds, fits in this middle ground here. And we call them, the good. You're good, I'm good, I might be closer to Hitler than Mother Teresa in your mind, but, you know, I'm in the good group. Your neighbours are in the good group, everybody is in the good group. They may make an occasional error here or there, but we're pretty good people.

Now I bring this up because when you come to Romans 1 and you read what Romans 1 describes is the state of human beings apart from God. It doesn't sound like us. Just listen to the language, Romans 1:29-32. The Apostle Paul starts to list what we call a vice list - details of wickedness as it shows up as people turn away from God. Here's his list,

"They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, *inventors of evil*, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 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."



I don't know about you but that just doesn't sound like my neighbour. I mean, inventor of evil, I mean look his dog occasionally, but inventor of evil, ruthless. That sounds like Hitler, sounds like Stalin. That does not sound like me or my neighbour, we're basically good people so it's to be understood and understandable that when we come to a passage like Romans 1, we read it and think, "Yeah, yeah, there are people out there like that, I know some of them, I've heard about some of them, I see some of them on the news, but that's not us. So thanks for the list Paul, but for the most part we are absolved, because we don't fit." Or do we? Paul's sneaky, he set you up, Romans 2 he turns the tables.

# [The Presence of Good People]

Here's how I want to study this, Romans 2:1-11, he describes, one - the presence of good people, two - the problem for good people, and third - the plight of good people. The presence, the problem, and the plight of good people. Here we go. Romans 2:1 the presence of good people. Look at verse 1,

"Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges."

I'm going to stop there because you didn't gasp. So let me explain to you why it is that you should have gasped. There was, in the earlier days of the internet, kind of around the turn of the century, there was a video that went around to me, people would email it to me from time to time saying, "You have to hear this sermon." The sermon was preached by a guy named Paul Washer, Paul Washer is a missionary and he was invited to speak at a Baptist youth conference in the southern part of the United States, and so 5,000 young men and women - high schoolers gathered together with their youth groups, almost entirely Christian group. They gathered together with their youth groups in this huge, huge, auditorium. And they're all sitting there, and Paul Washer got to speak on whatever, the Saturday night or whatever and he stood up and he was, you can watch it actually online today - he was so different than the way you commonly view a youth speaker. No jokes, no stories, just straight serious. He said to the students early on, the problem with American Christianity is that you have a whole bunch of people who think that because they prayed a prayer when they were seven years old, that that's going to somehow seal their eternal fate, forever, even though they've never shown any evidence of repentance, just because they prayed a prayer to Jesus, giving a mental assent to him, saying yes I believe you're real and it never transformed their lives, no repentance - and they think they're actually saved. And he said, that is probably the greatest false teaching in the church today. And of course all these kids are like, "What?!" These kids who've all prayed a prayer at some point, he starts to build in his tone as he's going. So I'll try to - you know we preachers we like to build in our town - so I'll try to echo his tone. Here's what he said, he said,

"Faith in Jesus Christ is preceded and followed by repentance. A turning away from sin, a hatred for the things that God hates a love for the things that God loves, a growing in holiness and a desire not to be, like Brittany Spears. [Remember it's 2002, right, not to be like Brittany Spears] not to be like the world, and not to be like the majority of American Christians but to be like Jesus Christ."



Right, so he raises and then the whole place erupts in claps "Wooooo!" A bunch of high school kids and they clap for about three seconds and he looks shocked watching on the stage and he says to them, "I don't know why your clapping, I'm talking about you." Way to kill the buzz in the room man, I mean, there's almost this audible gasp, "What!?" Because there's this room filled with Christian kids, Christian leaders who are all excited about, "Yeah I want to be like Jesus, you're talking about people out there and how they do it wrong, but we do it right." And he said, "No I'm talking about you!"

This is exactly what Paul does here. It's precisely his point, he's gone in Romans 1 to describe the wicked Gentiles out there, who do all these horrible things. Paul's probably writing from the city of Corinth and he's describing what he sees on the streets there. Corinth was like Las Vegas mixed with New York without restraint. And they're like, "Yeah, yeah people like that are horrible." You could almost see the people behind Paul as he's writing Romans 1, saying, "Yes, that's right," pointing their fingers, "You get'em Paul. Those wicked people out there, inventors of evil!" <clapping> Right, clapping, and there's this moment where Paul in Romans 2:1, "Therefore you have no excuse." And what do you expect? To who is addressing? You have no excuse, you guys out there, but Paul says, you have no excuse, you guys who are clapping, I don't know why you're clapping. I'm talking about you. You see why we ought to gasp. "What?! Wait a minute, no, no, no, no, no we were talking about them."

"No I'm talking about you." So the question is then, how is it that good people are without excuse. We good people who applaud rightly, Paul's condemnation of the wicked outsider - how are we without excuse, number two. The presence of good people, and second; the problem for good people.

### [The Problem for Good People]

Let me read Romans 2:1-5, it will explain quite clearly in fact. He says,

"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? Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed."

This is a very tightly argued, simple argument. He's basically saying - don't you love a flip chart <laughing>. Okay so point one, okay: God judges Romans 1 sin. Right we all agree on that, you guys were just clapping about it. You're point your fingers we got all excited, you're saying, "Go get'em Paul, that's exactly right, I wish my friend were here to hear this." That's what we all said, "Great, you described homosexual acts in there, that's exactly right, they're wrong, they're wicked, yes, yes!" So we're all agree: God judges Romans 1 sin. Point two: you do Romans 1 sin. What?!? Yeah okay maybe not as overtly, maybe not as grand, maybe not flaunting it in the culture, but behind closed



doors in your mind. Do you guys remember, of course, when Jesus said in the sermon on the mount you say you've heard it said, you shall not commit adultery. You say, "Yeah I don't commit adultery." But actually if you've lusted after a woman in your heart, you've committed adultery in your heart with her.

"Well I'm not a murderer!" Yeah but if you're angry with your brother the only things that are constraining you from doing the murder is the society at large and the fact that you'd probably get caught and punished if you did it right? That's what Jesus says in Matthew 5. Like inside of you there dwells all sorts of impulses that go that way, it's just that you're just a little bit more polite in public. You know how it works, you will bring shame on yourself if you do some of the stuff and so in the advent of the internet you do stuff like that without anyone seeing now, yeah? So you condemn the sexual sinner for their homosexual acts, and yet behind the closed doors you do the very same things. So if it works, that God judges, Romans 1 sin, and you do Romans 1 sin, therefore - you remember those days where you had philosophy, they had three little dots. Therefore, God will do ... you fill in the blank. What's he going to do with you? Applaud? "Yeah but don't you see I'm a good person, you seen my lawn God - it's clean!" God'll judge. The problem with good people is that they do the things they condemn in others. Good people see themselves as good but their actions prove otherwise.

When I was in college I had a friend who came to me to go for a ride, we would drive down one of the Seattle freeways to get to this location we were going to. He was riding in the passenger seat, and we were driving along the freeway and I was getting really frustrated because I was driving relatively the speed limit and there were people going <woo, woo, woo> right by me, and I was like, "What is wrong with all these people driving so horribly fast, it's dangerous these people. Where's a cop when you need them. Probably at the donut shop. I mean like where are the police! So angry at these people. Look at that guy, look how fast he goes." And then after about five or six minutes later, I was getting tired of being in the right lane, as you do, and I was like, okay enough. So I pulled out into the other lane and I sped up and I whipped by and of course you give everybody the glare. "Why are you so slow! Why are you so ...." You keep going by and my friend was looking at me and he said to me, "Do you ever wonder if the people who are sitting in those cars that you're passing right now are saying about you the very thing that you said a few minutes about the other people passing you?" I said, "Get out." [Laughter]

Have you guys noticed that you guys back in, you Canadians, you like to back into parking spots, have you ever noticed this? No? Okay sorry me and the other Americans around, this is a private conversation we have and I'm outing now, alright. We just don't understand why it is you back into everything. Okay so I'd drive down in the parking lot, Costco or whatever, and you're there and there's some person pulling forward and it looks like they're taking the left turn and then they stop and then they're lights come, and they start coming back, and you're like, "What are you doing? I'm right here, why are you backing up?" And then they roll their window down and they hold their hands out and you're like, "What, what? There's five cars behind me, and what are you, backing up? It's a one way road man. What are you doing?" Hands in the air. Finally they have to go forward and they're angry and of course you're angry, "Idiot." And you keep going. I get frustrated all the time with this. The other day I was actually in a parking lot and it was really busy and I had a little bit of time and I was like, "Oh you know I'll back in." Right [laughter] - that's what you call contextualization. So I pulled



forward and I'm backing in and of course some dude behind me comes right behind me and I can't back in and so I'm rolling my window down going, "What are you doing man." "Go forward," he says. "Idiot!" I said as I drove off. Don't you hate it when people text on the phone... hold on a second I got to get this text. Cause when they text me in the car its important, but that other guy it's because he's stupid and doesn't care about the public safety.

Jim Gaffigan is one of my favourite comedians, he has this lovely bit where he talks about McDonalds in his special called, *Mr. Universe*. And he's a catholic guy so I enjoy him because he is quite a clean comedian. Here's what he says about McDonalds. He's sort of a larger, pasty white guy. You don't expect... I mean he looks funny so he makes fun of his looks and how he eats and all sorts of things. Here's what he says, he says,

"I reference McDonalds a lot because I go to McDonalds. I love the silence the follows that statement, like, I just admitted to supporting dog fighting or something. 'How could you? McDonalds?' It's fun telling people you go to McDonalds. [Because] They always give me a look like, 'Oh! I didn't know I was better than you.' I mean, no one admits to going to McDonalds. But, they sell six billion hamburgers a day. There's are only 300 million people in the country. I'm not a calculus teacher but I think everyone's lying... But, we all know better, right? We've all read the articles and seen those documentaries. It's the same message. 'Look, McDonalds is really bad for you. It's high in fat and calories and we don't even know where the meat comes from.' And we're like, 'That's disgusting... I'll have a Big Mac, a large fry, and a two gallon drum of Diet Coke.' Because there's McDonalds denial. We all embrace it. No one is going in there innocent. We're walking into a red and yellow building with a giant M over it. 'What's this? A library? Well I may as well get some fries while I'm here.' But, I'm tired of people acting like they're better than McDonalds. It's like, you may have never set a foot in McDonalds but you have your own McDonalds. I mean maybe instead of buying a Big Mac, you read US Weekly. Hey, that's still McDonalds. It's just served up a little different. Maybe your McDonalds is telling yourself that Starbucks Frappuccinos are not a milkshake. Or maybe you just watch Glee. It's all McDonalds, McDonalds of the soul - Momentary pleasure followed by incredible guilt eventually leading to cancer."

Listen you and I have vice lists. We have lists of don'ts, we have a list of do's but we have a list of don'ts. Thou shalt not... and we fill in the blank; back into the parking spot, eat at McDonald's, talk on the phone, and rightly we are right in many of them. We decry it when we see it in other people. We always give ourselves a pass. Will God give us a pass?

Jesus when he confronts the good people of his day. And when I say good you guys need to know that when I say the word Pharisee, everyone who's kind of grown up in the church goes, "Ewww, they're awful." You don't understand, in the first century the Pharisees were the best people around. Like if you were going to send your kids to your neighbours house to play and the neighbour was a Pharisee, you were like I mean you can go, stay there, it will be better for your kids. Their yards were perfect, they're the best neighbours. They do all the right things, they honour God in ways that you can't even imagine. They're the good guys. So when Jesus comes and he starts confronting these

Pharisees and it builds - particularly in the book of Matthew - and it builds in the beginning to when you get to Matthew 23, and he starts just flat blasting them. It's really kind of surprising. Listen to the language that Jesus uses for the Pharisees, and why he uses the language. Matthew 23:1-3, 25-28, 33,

"Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, 'The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, [meaning that they have spiritual authority over you as a nation and Israel. They sit on Moses seat,] so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice... Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness... You serpents, you brood of vipers, [you snakes] how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?'"

Words of the Lord, about people who have vice lists that they don't keep themselves.

You might know the name Ted Haggard, you might now. Ted Haggard was the pastor of one of the largest churches in the United States in the early 2000's. His church was in Colorado Springs, CO. They had about 14, 000 people in it at the time of his great debacle, and by debacle let me explain what I mean there. He was the president of the National Association of Evangelicals, which is the largest political organization only smaller than two organizations in the United States - the Republican National Committee and the Democratic National Committee. So those two are larger in terms of their affiliations and then you have the NAE, the National Association of Evangelicals. I mean this guy was on the top of the heap. If somebody wanted to come and interview an evangelical to hear their viewpoints about a particular political matter, they would go to Ted Haggard. He was on all the ... Anderson Cooper, he was on all, CNN, MSNBC, Fox News, I mean he was on *all* of the shows. Great, great Christian success - Ted Haggard.

Until in 2006 he was outed by a gay prostitute who he repeatedly hired for having homosexual relations with that man. Ted Haggard used to stand in the middle of his pulpit and decry homosexual behaviour at every turn. He'd go on the talk shows and he would talk about it because that was one of the hot subjects that they would ask about. And he would talk about God's way and behind the scenes apparently after those interviews were done in the public, in the private behind the closed the doors he was hiring this gay prostitute to come and visit him. The man, the prostitute, only outed him, he learned, he saw on the TV one time, Ted Haggard being interviewed and he thought, he said, "Oh my goodness, that's the man who hires me. And listen to what he's saying about the very things that we do." At first Ted Haggard rejected all of the claims. He said, "It's not true this man's a liar. He's just trying to ruin me, all of the other leaders in the evangelical world backed up Ted, I mean he's Ted Haggard - you back him, he's our friend. And then a little bit later another young man came out, a 20

year old gay man who had been receiving counselling from Ted Haggard and had started to volunteer in their church and at times they would travel together. CNN carried the story, this is what they wrote,

"Evangelical pastor Ted Haggard described Thursday as 'fundamentally true' and assertion that he engaged in an inappropriate relationship with a 20 year old male volunteer in 2006. The incident occurred when the two men were sharing a room together, Grant Haas [this is the man's name] Grant Haas said, 'He pretty much asked me if it was OK if he [pleasured himself] in front of me or [pleasured himself] in the bed next to me,' Haas said. 'I told him no, it would make me feel really uncomfortable. But [he didn't listen,] he just grabbed a bottle of lotion...' Haas added, '(Haggard) used to say to me, "You know what, Grant, you can become a man of God, and you can have a little bit of fun on the side."""

Well, you can imagine his entire ministry blew up. He was fired as the president of the NAE, he lost his pulpit, he was actually asked to leave the state for several reasons. As he was going though, he wanted to at least give himself some level of better name in his community and so he went and he spoke to a news radio show, a talk show where people call in. And so he went on this show, he and his wife, his wife did not leave him. He went on this show, and could actually watch this, it's on TLC special, called *Ted Haggard: Scandalous*, and on this talk show there are people calling in and you know what they're saying to him, "You are gross." 'Disgusting." "Do you know what you've done to your church, do you know what you've done to your wife, do you know what you've done to the name of Jesus in this community. Do you have any idea the severity of what has happened here?" People are incensed using language that shouldn't be on the radio to decry this man's sin.

I'm watching this, this week, and I'm torn inside, because on the one hand I'm agreeing with them. I'm saying, "Yes all of the things that you're saying about Ted Haggard are absolutely true. Yes! Yes!" And yet, in my gut, I'm thinking after reading a passage like Romans 2, I wonder what's actually going on in the life of the caller when they hang up and they close the door. I mean you're decrying the sexual sin of Ted Haggard but I wonder when you're all alone and it's just you and the computer, how's that go for ya? Men, blasting him for his unfaithfulness, when you draw the curtains later today, is that true of you? I mean we say, how horrible it is when somebody gossip's about us, "Oh my goodness did you hear what they said behind my back? How dare they? I have right mind to go and tell my friends about it." "You make me so angry when you get so angry." <Sigh> Woah to you hypocrites. You clean the outside of the cup, your Facebook profile looks great, your Instagram's wonderful, but what's going on behind the scenes.

You know Jesus in Romans 2:16, just in the next few verses, he says this, or Paul says this about Jesus and his judgment. He says,

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

The secrets of men, I'm not asking you what goes on in the public person that you've put before everyone - I'm asking you what happens in the secret. Where are you on that grid? You with Mother Teresa?

### [The Plight of Good People]

So what's going to be the plight of good people who do what they condemn in others. I've titled this sermon, actually, bad news for good people, largely based upon these last few verses, Romans 2:6-11, I'll just read them,

"He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality."

Doesn't matter what background you come from, doesn't matter what get-out-of-jail passes you can pull out of your back pocket. "You're not going to judge me because of ..." and you put it before God for that, this passage is essentially saying, listen, when God goes and he opens the operating guidelines of the universe and he turns to page 36 where the judgement rules are started and he goes to section two paragraph four, he'll open up - here' what it says: all those who do good, who seek righteousness, will receive eternal life. Those who are self seeking though will receive wrath and tribulation and the fury of God, which do you think you are? My good friends - which are we? I think we're in deep trouble. I think we good people are more gross than we think and as a result there awaits for us wrath and fury, tribulation and distress. So the question that you have to ask yourself is; what will I do, because no matter how hard I try I cannot get out of the pit I've dug. My sin, my wickedness, the proclivities in my own heart, they keep me down, I cannot climb out by myself, I cannot do it. And if the standard is that there is no way for me to get out of this. Who will deliver me from the body of this death? I mean the only way possibly, that you could maybe get out of this is if you could find someone who actually could keep that kind of law, do it perfectly and then attribute their goodness to you, and take your unrighteousness on them, but who on earth could possibly do that? Is there anyone as good as that? Mmmmm .... You see the glory now of the gospel right, and that the answer to the question that Paul is plaguing us with is found in Christ, and he gets to Romans 8 and he'll say this, this is in the New Living Translation. Romans 8:1, 3-4,

"So now there is no condemnation [you were condemned! But there's *no* condemnation] for those who belong to Christ Jesus ...The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. He did this so that the just requirement of the law would be fully satisfied for us."

Listen let me just do that in an illustration I've used before. You have to imagine that you're in a prison cell and there's no way out unless you clean that prison cell absolutely perfectly. Everyday the guard will come in, the warden will come in, and he will wipe his finger across the window sills, he will make sure the chairs are straight, you have to do it perfectly and if you do it perfectly you will be set free. And you try really hard the first day, and then the warden comes in and he looks around and he notices things are relatively clean and then he looks at the top of the window sill, he wipes his fingers, little white glove, and there's dirt up there and he says, "Sorry I'll see you tomorrow, have another try." So you remember, mental note: window sill, clean that. So you do that the next day and he shows up and then he notices that one of the chairs is out of true, he says, "I'm sorry you failed here, so I'm going to come back tomorrow." You think, okay window sill and chair; and you fix those two. And the next day he comes back, "Okay there's a wrinkle in your bed." Okay, window sill, chair, and the wrinkle. He comes back the next day, and the next day, and the next day, and the next day, and you've never been able to do it. You cannot do it, until one day at the door of your cell, there stands a man who says, "Listen, I'm really good at this. I've freed others, and I'm really good at it. So what I want to do is I want to come into your cell, and I want to clean it for you." And you're so at the end of your rope that you say, "Fine, fine, come in." So the door - he comes in, and he stands in this cell, and he cleans and you watch him clean. And the next day the warden comes and checks the sill, and checks the chair, and checks the bed, and checks everything and says, "Perfect." He turns to you and says, "You may go free." And you're elated, but you think, "Oh but tomorrow I have to come back here and make sure that it's clean again. But, this man, who stood at the door of your cell and has cleaned it for you - now says, "No I'll stay, I'll stay here the rest of your life so that in the eyes of the law you will always be righteous." You do see what a glorious thing this is.

So listen, listen, two just quick applications. One - if you are not a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, if you've been playing around and think, "No, no I'm a really good person, I don't really need that kind of thing, I just need a leg up." Rubbish, you need more than a leg up, you're in a deep ditch. You are in a cell and there is only one way out - it's to answer the door when he knocks. Cause he will come in and he will fulfill all that he'll offer you and he will grant you his righteousness and he will take on him your sin. Why would you turn this away? Why would you not turn away from everything else that you've ever had, so that you may gain this treasure. And listen, most of you - I'm preaching to the choir as they say, you're like, "Yes I've done that in my life, I've committed my life to Jesus." But man do you realize what you've got? Do you realize what he's done? You're realize the fact that your life is the way it is, is because you don't recognize and focus on this fact enough, that you were in that cell and he's still there cleaning it for you and in the eyes of God you're completely righteous. Smell the air as you walk out of the cell and across the yard and out the gates and walk through the fields as a free man, as a free woman, breath it deeply! You will always and forever be righteous! How do you respond to that right? Ahh I urge you therefore brothers by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice. It's a reasonable act of worship don't you think? Marvelous, good news for good people. Let me pray.

Father, I'm so thankful for your grace, I ask you'd bless us with a deeper knowledge of the gospel and a deeper knowledge of our Lord Jesus. We pray it in his name, Amen.