

Unshakeable: Romans "A Faith Built on the Gospel"

Right Motives, Wrong Results

For more than forty years a lighthouse stood on a large peninsula jutting into the Tasman Sea in southern Australia. It stood at a place where it shouldn't have, luring ignorant ships into the very rocks they were trying to avoid.

The cliffs around Cape St George just south of Jervis Bay were notorious for shipwrecks.

It was decided that a lighthouse was needed for the safe navigation of coastal shipping. In 1857, the Colonial Architect Alexander Dawson began looking for a site suitable for a lighthouse on Cape St George. Unfortunately, Dawson was more interested in building a great lighthouse rather than placing it in the proper place to warn ships.

Despite the glaring problems with placing it in the wrong spot and disagreement by a majority of the board, for reasons not known, the chairman of board authorized the construction of the lighthouse. For the next four decades the ill-sited lighthouse was responsible for some two dozen shipwrecks. Eventually in 1899, the lighthouse was replaced by the Point Perpendicular Lighthouse in a much more suitable location on this part of the coast.

Even after decommissioning, the lighthouse continued to cause navigational problems especially on moonlit nights when the golden sandstone tower glowed in the dark. So in the late 1800's, the tower was reduced to rubble (**change**) to prevent any further disaster.

Kaushik, "The Lighthouse That Wrecked More Ships Than it Saved," AmusingPlanet.Com (10-16-18)

Something built to prevent people from death . . . brought more death than it saved.

Well intentioned ideas but something terribly missed. Right motives but the wrong result. Possibly on purpose, possibly because of laziness . . . possibly because of pride. It brought death.

There is something about preventing death being a very serious issue. We take neglect very seriously in our modern world . . . people get into lots of trouble if they don't do things properly and it leads to death. Lawsuits, here they come – possible jail time. It's one thing with life and death on this side of eternity it's another thing with eternal life and death.

Eternity . . . Not many think about it and how to get there, but we should.

We've been doing a series called **Unshakeable Looking at the book of Romans and talking about faith built on the gospel**. Today we are looking at a passage that on the surface paints a picture of something that looks really good, helpful . . . but there is something very important that is missing.

Take your Bibles and turn to Romans 2:17-29

Can you be so well intentioned with your belief yet miss it?

Before we get into this passage let's reflect a little bit on the previous chapters . . . we have dug deep with Pastor David the past few weeks, there is a major theme that is talked about since Chapter 1. It is something that we are faced with throughout these verses, it's the sinfulness of humans. Romans 1:18-32 talks about the sinful issues with the world – the Roman world at the time. There were big problems and people did horrible sinful things.

In Chapter 2 last week, Pastor David helped us to unpack the first 16 verses. How can anyone stand and face God's Judgement? And he unpacked how we can deal with sin and face God's judgement head on.

1. I don't stand by comparison, but by repentance (v. 1-5)
2. I don't stand in my own righteousness, but in Christ (v. 6-11)
3. I don't stand on justice, but by Grace (v. 12-16)

Great truths to wrap our heads around.

As this chapter continues to unfold the writer of Romans, Paul . . . introduces in this chapter the concept of the law in verse 12 . . . the Old Testament rules and regulations that Jewish people were to follow.

The writer, Paul, is talking more to the Jewish people as we continue in this chapter . . . the ones who had the truth of God for thousands of years. Paul was a Jew himself, Jesus was a Jew and all the disciples were Jews and they all grew up with the law. In a way, Paul is talking to his ethnic religious people and there were a number of Jews within the church at Rome.

Paul digs deep here to show that the so-called people of God – the Jewish people – have a righteousness problem . . . a sin problem.

Last week Pastor David briefly talked about the law showing us justice and how so often we want justice only when it is applied to someone else, and not to ourselves. We'd rather someone else brought to justice for breaking the law, not ourselves. If you break the law . . . we want grace, not justice.

Paul continues to build in this chapter to let us know that each human being is far more sinful than we choose to admit . . .

Now Paul moves into some very good things that people are doing. Well intentioned things but there is something wrong.

Romans 2:17-29 – If you are able to stand with me for the reading of God's word.

Can someone be so well intentioned with their belief yet miss it?

There are many good things that Paul points out about his people . . . his Jewish friends.

1. They rely on God's word and boast in God (verse 17)

These people can tell you all sorts of things about God . . . because they know their Bible and God. Many religious Jewish people of the past knew their Old Testament so well. They could quote most or all of it.

2. They know the Bible so well and know what is superior (verse 18)

They know the moral will of God: They know what God's will is.

The law teaches the moral will of God. Things like bearing false witness, lying, taking the Lord's name in vain, not committing adultery, not coveting...staying away from that. They had the rules memorized and expanded on.

But they also know that God is about being generous, kind, grateful and about showing true love to others. The list can go on about the superior things that they know the law teaches.

3. They are a guide to the blind...a light for those who are in darkness (verse 19)

The people knew the word of God...they know their proverbs in and out. For the people who can't see the truth...they are the ones who can point people to it. Those who are wondering in darkness...they are the ones who can shine the light in the darkness. For the foolish people, they can correct them. Truly honest, good people, love to have them as a next-door neighbour, a good teacher. Phenomenal people of society.

4. They can educate people well because they have the embodiment of knowledge and truth (verse 20)

They are instructors of little children because they are all about knowledge and truth. Schools are started; children are taught the truth. Education in poor parts of the world was happening because of these people teaching.

5. They can outwardly show that they are religious (verse 25)

He talks to the Jewish men who take pride in keeping the law. One way they show that they are true Jewish people is that they are circumcised. God's ancient covenant with Abraham...there was an outward symbol of circumcision. As a group of people who were to follow the commandments that Leviticus talked about...one of the commandments was for all the males to be circumcised. This was an outward sign to show that they were followers of the law. It was a substantial ritual.

So the Apostle Paul thought these things were good things. Highly well-intentioned things. These religious Jewish people had great motives and lots of zeal.

The problem is, trying to find a righteousness on your own by doing good things, is not good enough.

The results are failure (Romans 2:21-24)

But that isn't good enough. Paul asked in verse 21, do you teach yourself? Do you really teach the word to yourself? He goes on and lists of hypocrisy in their lives:

- Preaching against stealing...do you steal? Ok, maybe these good people didn't rob a bank or an armoured car. They didn't get arrested for stealing from a store or stealing a car. But everyone has struggled with stealing – a cookie from mom, an idea you heard from someone you used.
- Committing adultery...do you do that? Maybe not a true affair with another person, but Jesus said in Matthew 5 that even if you look at someone lustfully, it is considered adultery.
- Abhorring idols...idolatry was all over the Roman Empire. In most cities the Temple of the idol was in the centre of the city and what the city was known for. Doing business in that city would mean making money that was intertwined with idolatry. It was impossible to be away from it.
- Boast in the law but break the law...no one could keep the whole law.
- And he says God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles...He is looking back in Isaiah 52:5. People curse their God because of what they are doing – not able to live up to their own laws.

I don't want to be with these hypocrites. The passage goes on in verse 25.

He talks to the Jewish men who take pride in keeping the law with circumcision . . .

The Rabbis in Paul's day attached great value to circumcision and made many statements like this one of R. Levi: "In the Hereafter Abraham will sit at the entrance to Gehenna (another name for Hell), and permit no circumcised Israelite to descend therein" (Gen. Rab. 48:8)¹

Jews thought having this sign and keeping the law would keep them out of Hell. Paul says there is a problem with that thinking.

Romans 2:25b

It's a good thing if you keep the law...but Jewish people can't keep every aspect of the law. The law was there to show the people the standard to live by with a Holy God...they fell short of that standard time and time again.

Romans 2:26-27

Paul talks about the one who obeys law – and does not have this outward sign – they are the true Jews.

Jesus talked about this in **Matthew 12:41-42**.

"The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here. The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now something greater than Solomon is here."

Jesus talks about Ninevah judging the Jewish people...Ninevah who were the non-Jews. The Queen of the south...a non-Jew, will be judging the Jewish people in Jesus' day. Because they did not respond to the truth about Jesus.

Paul goes on and says in verses 28 -29...

In a way he is going back to **Deuteronomy 30:6**.

"The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live."

It's about what is going on in the heart, not on the body, that truly matters. God knows the heart.

For the Jewish person, circumcision has some value, but it isn't the thing that brings righteousness. That is what Paul is getting at.

Can someone be so well intentioned with their belief yet miss it? Yes!!!

The result is failure . . . the ships crash on the rocks – the lighthouse is useless, everyone is lost.

This list of good things is not good enough.

So what is it that Paul is getting at here?

He is saying that the Jewish people – his people – if they think they are righteous by pointing people to the law and trying to live out the law...it's not good enough.

¹ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 139–140.

They need a righteousness that is apart from the law...found in Jesus Christ.

Paul knew that part of the issue with the Jewish people was they were riding on customs they were brought up with. Instead of finding their righteousness in Christ.

I think you and I could easily park there and say, "see those ancient Jewish people? They chased after the wrong things and it led to destruction."

But I think we need to look at ourselves:

Now you, if you call yourself a Bible-Believing Christian.

1. You rely on God's word and boast in God

Anyone can know about God and God's word. Like about the trinity, how the Son submits to the Father and the Spirit submits to the Son and the Father. How they are three persons in one. We can go on about God.

James tells us that Satan and his demons know the word. James 2:19 "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the **demons** believe – and shudder!" There is more to belief than just knowing things and knowing it well.

2. You know the Bible so well you know what is superior

There is no other book better than this one. It is absolutely superior. 66 books that tell us the story of God and His plan for humanity.

An ancient book preserved throughout time with thousands of ancient copies that have been meticulously copied over the centuries. The copied copies are exact to the original. You can trust the Bible so well.

We can have it memorized and can quote many verses. The word of God is important. We as a church would say it is our final authority. It is like a double-edged sword piercing the heart. Someone can know about the Bible so well yet miss what most important.

3. You are a guide to the blind; a light for those who are in darkness

The truth of God's word...speak the truth, don't tell lies. Love your neighbour, Love God. There is wisdom in the bible about relationships, family life and business life.

Realize that Christ is coming back to set the world straight. Our justice system is based on the Bible and the truth of that brings truth to foolish people.

Knowing the proverbs, knowing the wisdom of the Bible makes life better for the person who has that.

4. You can educate people very well because you have the embodiment of the truth.

Maybe you help in Kid's Church...or have helped teach children at Camp. Maybe you instruct children and also encourage them. You point them to the truth.

Christians were known for bringing education to the needy of the world. How do you understand and read the Bible if you can't read? But giving people knowledge does not necessarily change them.

I've heard advocates say...the most important thing that prisoners need is education. I don't think that is the most important...when you educate a criminal all you get is a smart criminal. We need something more than instruction on knowledge and truth.

5. **Outwardly show that they are religious**

Christians practice baptism. You can say, "I've been baptized." I had the ritual where I was baptized. In some traditions people have their babies or young children christened or baptized. This is well intentioned but is that enough?

Paul says there is something missing. So often people get so wrapped up looking at doing good things and miss the most important thing. We can't be righteous on our own.

In verse 21 Paul says you don't teach it yourself, you're not getting it. You don't understand what it is all about.

As Paul talks to his Jewish friends, he tells us we need the Old Testament law:

- The Law shows us that we need to be broken and contrite before a Holy God
- The Law is about faith and mercy and the grace of God

They didn't have faith, they had their own righteousness. Doing things to get their righteousness. That is what he says.

Romans 1:16-17

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'"

The righteous don't live by works...by doing things. We start with Faith. You and I need to receive the gift of Salvation...only what Christ has done on the Cross. Taking your sins on the cross. When Jesus said it is finished...there was nothing else you or I could do to earn righteousness. It was done by Jesus on the cross. He declared us righteous by his great act. It starts there.

Some of you would say, what about works? Works are important but faith is the most important. It all starts with faith.

I've seen this in church too often...people pursuing a righteousness, something they were taught growing up.

The church I grew up in had attendance awards...one of my friends won the attendance award – faithful to church for many years as a kid. He came with his family and wore that award with pride. I don't think he listened at church, but he had that award. When he left home, he never came back to church...something was missing.

I had some friends attend a church club, memorizing all sorts of verses and getting award after award – lots of awards to be proud about. They were smart kids who could memorize well. But when they got older, they left the church. They memorized it but did they apply it?

Moms and dads, when I was a youth pastor...I've heard too often over the years that being a Christian is about being good. Some say, I want obedient children who do good things. I want children who dress

right. I want children who respect others and show love. I want children who know how to serve and be a positive good for society.

Parents the road to hell is paved with good intentions. In our zeal for righteousness we miss the place where righteousness comes from.

I'm all for regular attendance at church and scripture memory and living good lives but let's not miss the most important thing, having a righteousness is not by wearing an award or being good, having a righteousness is not of ourselves but from Christ.

Some of you might say...Pastor John are you against doing good things? No, they are important but not the most important.

Ephesians 2:8-10

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

To whom does your heart belong?

Paul says, do we teach ourselves? Do we heed the warning?...and we should tremble? Whom am I trusting in for my righteousness...my salvation? Who has my heart...is it in the finished work of Jesus or is it with the things I do?

May we have a heart towards and a belief in the only one that can only bring true righteousness...Jesus Christ.

So many good things to do out there...so many things that look righteous...like a lighthouse on a cliff but it points the ships to destruction and not to life.

Well intentioned ideas but something terribly missed. Right motives but the wrong result.

May we cling to the Righteousness done by Jesus on the cross to save us for all eternity. We can't do it on our own. Let's continue to seek Him.