

# How Bad Is It?

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Preacher: Chaplain Andy Pynch

[ 0 : 00 ] We are continuing on in our study in the book of Romans. So if you have a copy of God's Word, go ahead and turn there. We're looking at Romans chapter 1.

It's a continuation of what Matthew discussed last week in the first couple verses of Romans chapter 1. Romans chapter 1, verses 28 to 32.

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.

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.

[ 1 : 03 ] 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.

Let's pray. Lord, your Word exposes us for who we truly are. We pray that you might use it this morning, even simply the reading of your Word, to show us our need of Jesus.

And Father, that you might work a miracle in our hearts, that we might trust Him, that we might serve Him. But Father, that we would love Him.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Imagine you've just witnessed a new movie trailer. And you know movie trailers. They're all the exciting parts about the movie.

And this movie trailer, whether you see it with your family, or you happen across a movie poster that captures all these visual images, it's a coming-of-age story, whatever that means, where a young man has grown out of poverty, gone off to war, made a name for himself.

[ 2 : 11 ] He returns home. He gets involved in politics. He's charged with murder and found not guilty. Not just once, but twice.

He starts a new business. And that new business is ultimately his demise. Not financial ruin, but his business partner has murdered him.

Sounds incredible, right? I'm watching that movie. There's so much in there. Whether it's silver screen or real life or a podcast or a story, I want to know more.

Now that's the real life story of the great-grandfather of William Faulkner. You know that guy that you were supposed to read in high school, and maybe you did or maybe you didn't. Now what some have argued that made Faulkner great was he was a great storyteller.

But he was telling stories that he knew by heart, or he had heard retold so many times that he was really familiar with them. And he used elements of his great-grandfather's life in most of his works.

[ 3 : 15 ] And so he could tell so well because he had heard it over and over again throughout his life. Now whether you read Faulkner in high school or not, or whether you enjoy him now, you have to appreciate good storytelling because it's an art.

And whether it's your granddad who tells stories or spins yarns, whether they're true or not true, storytelling captures our imagination with words. And we get trapped in this world.

And yes, they use rhetorical devices or ancient ideas ideas of how to capture audiences and hold their attention. Storytelling takes work.

And I'm convinced that often the best stories are the ones that are real life, just like the great-granddad of William Faulkner. Whether in written form, fiction, true life, a radio story, a podcast, the best storytellers do all these same things.

They draw us in, and they use those words to paint pictures that we can see and that we can enjoy. Now the Bible is no different. In fact, if you want to know good stories, ask these kids that were just promoted.

[ 4 : 31 ] They'll tell you the good stories of the Bible if you don't know them. And they're the ones that we're generally familiar with. But when we come to this section of Romans, it's not the storyteller that we think of that is often that good.

We don't think that Paul is in the list of like Leo Tolstoy, or Jane Austen, or Tolkien, or Lewis. We don't put Paul's name in that section.

We don't compare him to Faulkner, or Stephen King, or R.L. Stine, or Paul Harvey. But he is a grand storyteller, especially in this part of Romans.

And so this morning, we're going to look together at this grand story of both God and man. And as we do so, we're going to do the things that we did in elementary school. We're going to dissect it and look at all those sections of a great story.

A great story has things like this. Setting the stage, an introduction. Then there's a plot twist. And of course, don't forget the conclusion.

[ 5 : 40 ] So we're going to see how Paul does that in Romans this morning. So the very best place to start is not here at the section which we've just read. But in fact, let's go back to verse 25 that we looked at last week.

So if you have your Bibles, turn back a few pages. Or sections. Because they exchange, and they is all of mankind.

People. The truth about God for a lie. And worshiped and served the creature rather than the creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. Man's kind at this point, as Paul is setting the stage for this grand story, here in the beginning part of Romans, we can't say that that relationship or that story is going very well, can we?

At least from verse 25, it seems to be going extremely poorly. In fact, if we look at God's law, they've been derailed by the first commandment.

They didn't even get to the other ones. They've exchanged worship of God for something else. Now look at verse 28. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.

[ 6 : 55 ] Instead of worshiping God as they know that they should, that they're reminded of in the first commandment, they've done this instead. They did not acknowledge God or see fit to do so.

They didn't approve of giving him his due worship, the deference, the honor that he is owed. Paul's reiterating what he said back in verse 25.

They've exchanged the worship of God, the true God, for something that's fake, for something that God has made. They're not faking of themselves, but we shouldn't worship them as such.

And by doing so, they've effectively said that God is worthless. Imagine that. God, who we are supposed to worship, now is worthless.

Now you can imagine, Paul is walking them through history. And as he does so, and we have arrived at this conclusion, that they're saying God is worthless, it is not going very well in setting the stage for the story of God and man.

[ 8 : 00 ] Look back at verse 21 with me. This isn't anything new. They knew him, but they did not honor him or give thanks to him. They launched into that foolish thinking headlong and darkened their hearts.

Or verse 24, that God gave man over the darkness of his own heart, and it's culminated in this serving creation instead of the creator. This story is not looking very good.

Now, remember up to this point, Paul is setting the stage for the story of God and man. And we see it is not going very well. But a reader, or Paul's audience, based on what we heard last week, they can look at that sin of exchanging natural relations for man and woman, and say, I don't do that, so this surely can't be about me.

This story, this rift that's growing between God and man, that ain't me. And I'm okay. And then Paul enters this plot twist. With any good story, the background simply sets up for what's going to advance the story.

It's the preliminary work. But what is this plot twist? Because the reader, or the audience, goes, hey, that ain't me. But Paul is going to turn his attention to all of us, whether they engage in that or not.

[ 9 : 24 ] You can't go bebopping along and think this isn't about you. The reader, whether or not they fall into the sexual sin that's described earlier, knows that it's just about him.

Or maybe the absent-minded reader forgets the story in the Gospels, where the man stands up and says what? Thank you for not making me like that man, a sinner.

And if you know Jesus' response, you know what's coming from Paul. It's not going to go well for you either. Look with me at the end of verse 28 through 30.

God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, and malice.

They're full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They're gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

[10:33] Gosh, that is a long list. All told, there's something like 20 some odd different sins that are listed in here. And at first, it seems like it's just this random collection.

But they differ when we compare them to what we saw last week. Last week, sin was flagrant, public, visible. This week, it's not necessarily so.

But we see something else. We see that there is this pervasive nature of sin. It extends to everyone. So that man that stands up and says, Thank you, Lord, for making me not like him.

Then turns and sees this list and realizes, Oh, this is really about me. As one writer has said, We're at the saturation point of sin.

They have filled. They have filled the earth. They were commanded to fill the earth. Mankind was at the beginning to do what? Be fruitful and multiply. And then take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

[11:35] To fill it. To fill all of creation. And here, we have the reversal of this. They filled the earth to the saturation point with evil.

With unrighteousness. With things that are against God's law. How bad is it? It's real bad. It's as wide and deep as water in the sea.

And it's everywhere. And there is no escape. It's everywhere. If you've lived in Colorado for any amount of time, especially on the south side of Colorado Springs, you know something about wide and deep as far as the eye can see, especially in the month of September.

It's not heat. Thank goodness it's not humidity. It's something a lot more sinister than that. It's tarantulas.

Tarantulas. If you know about tarantulas on this side, and if you've spent any amount of time outside from here and south, you know about tarantulas.

And I'm not talking about one tarantula. I'm talking about wave upon wave. You can see them from the sky if you're flying really low. Tarantulas.

[12:50] The spiders that'll bite you. In theory, they won't kill you, but it's still stinking hurts.

Tarantulas are everywhere. One is bad, but wave upon wave of male tarantulas searching for their mate as they come north from New Mexico or Arizona.

I don't know where they come from. That's way worse. One is bad. Wave upon wave is worse. Sin is bad.

We've learned that last week. But sin described here is way worse. It's reached this fulfillment where there is wave upon wave that there is inescapable. Sin is reaching to every corner of every heart.

And Paul groups them here in verses 29 and 30. He says there's some kind of order. And we said at first glance, it doesn't seem like there is some kind of order. But he starts with unrighteousness in this other list, showing how far the reach of sin is.

And wave upon wave, there's more and more. That next grouping shows that full brunt of wickedness, that humanity has a problem, and it's not just internal.

[14:02] It's not one type of sin, but there's all kinds of sin. And then there's the crescendo, the final wave that makes it even worse. They're defined by sin.

They should flee from these things, but instead they are known by them. It's who they are. How bad is it? It's not just visible sin, but it's sin that touches every part of our lives and every part of every human's life.

We can't say with that man, thank you for not making me like this sinner. But instead, we have to deal with our own sin.

When we talk about sin, we're talking about God, breaking God's law, right? But there's an aspect that's much larger than that. The theologian R.C. Sproul called it cosmic treason.

In doing so, he's drawn us into an aspect that's much more deeply personal. Yeah, fraud is bad, but when I sin, when I murder my friend or my father, that is much worse.

[15:14] It's a betrayal. Fraud is wrong, but treason kind of hits differently. The Bible describes this as enmity, and there's reconciliation that's needed for that enmity that comes from sin.

We're made enemies of God, and God has to reconcile us because we've broken that relationship in this treasonous act. As we think on this, there are a couple practical things that we should seek to accomplish because right now, the story is not looking good.

The one-time Colorado pastor, A.W. Pink, said this. He wrote extensively on the righteousness of God, and we realize how much God hates sin, and that's unique to us because we have wayward hearts.

He says, when we study this, we should think about these three things. The first is, when we do this, it should reorient our hearts because our hearts are wayward, and thinking about this, we see how often and how prone we are to deal with it lightly and think it's, eh, it's not that big of a deal. We gloss over it. We make excuses for sin, but that's not the picture that Paul gives us. The second thing we should do is recapture a sense of the fear of God, and I'm not sure I know what we mean by fear in this day, but it's fear in the sense of remembering that He is the Creator and that we are the creature, that we approach Him with a holy, reverent awe, that He is completely different than us because when we lose that, we have to recapture the sense that we are completely made in His image, and we are dependent upon Him.

[17:07] How often do we need to ask ourselves, are we truly in awe of God? Not very often. The third thing for the Christian is, are we praising Him for being delivered from His righteous punishment against us?

He said this, how reluctant we are to meditate on His wrath towards sin becomes a test of our attitude towards God. He encourages us, He encourages us, even to this day, that each of us needs to be more prayerfully on His guard against devising an image of God in our own image, that we think of God like us instead of how He really is.

Paul reminds us that this list, these things that we shrug at and think aren't that big of a deal, I mean, after all, is that big of a deal? Haughty?

I don't even really know what that word means. Is that that big of a deal? It is because God says so, and Paul reminds us of that. And we have to take Him at His word when it comes to the story of God and man.

When it comes to the story of how we deal with sin, even in our own hearts. Now there's a plot twist that we've just identified. It goes from setting the stage of sin is present in this world to the plot twist of, oh, we can't go bebopping along, that sin is even in our own hearts.

[18:46] And then it seems like Paul concludes it with this, that it's real bad. Sin is really bad. Paul concludes in these final verses, though they knew 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. Paul reminds us that mankind has to know about God's righteous requirements.

He has to know about God's righteousness. righteousness. But not only did they not practice that righteousness that God requires, they then encouraged others to do it. And that's worse because we've gone from partaking in sin, knowing what's going to happen, to then encouraging others, cheering them on from the sidelines and saying, yeah, you go do that too.

Or you go do that. Knowing full well what is to come for them. That's what makes it worse. It's knowing that there's a penalty coming, a just penalty, a known penalty.

It's not some shifting scale, some sliding rule of what's going to happen, and I'm trying to figure that out. No, we've known the rule from the beginning, God says, from his word.

[19:58] We've known the rule from Deuteronomy that we read. It's been clear. It's something that God told his people of old. It's not a shifting standard. It's clear from what we read earlier in our service.

It's clear from what happens in the garden. It's clear from what happens to God's people all along the way. It's clear even under those kings who led God's people astray to worship things that were untrue.

It is clear. It's clear from God's own son, his witness. It's clear that sin is breaking God's law. It's clear that it's cosmic treason, that we are enemies of God, and we have to have something to reconcile us, to restore us to right relationship.

That's clear. Clear that we deserve the righteous penalty for sin. You and me. Isaiah reminds us of this in chapter 59.

He writes this, Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God. Your sins have hidden his face so that he does not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood and your fingers

with iniquity.

[ 21 : 14 ] Your lips have spoken lies. Your tongue mutters wickedness. And then he'll go on later and say these famous lines, Their feet run to evil, and they are swift to shed innocent blood.

This is the type of story, both in Paul and even in Isaiah, that leaves us deeply unsettled. Because at this point in the story, we're at the conclusion. But we walk away from the story not knowing necessarily what to do.

And you look at the story and wonder, there's no good end to this. I know this is an unpopular opinion, but a few years ago, there was a movie that came out by Cormac McCarthy, No Country for Old Men.

And the movie follows along, and you walk away from the movie wondering what happened. Where is the resolution? Where is the white knight coming in? Some will argue there is resolution. I don't think there is.

The same is true if you think about what we've gone through in Judges. You have humans doing absolute wickedness to other humans, and you're left thinking, what is going to go on? And you're left with these words.

[ 22 : 22 ] For there was no king in Israel, and everyone did what was right in their own eyes. The same is true when you come to this section of Romans 1.

And even more so when we think about what's gone on from 18 to here, verse 18 to here. You're left thinking, what is going to go on? There's no hope. There's no conclusion. There's no resolution. We're just left knowing that man has broken God's law, and we're left kind of wanting. What am I supposed to do with that, Paul?

Are you a great storyteller or not? But, in the famous words of Paul Harvey, the radio storyteller, he had a famous line that he closed each radio segment with.

Now you know the rest of the story. And he did that because when he would tell his stories, he would leave out a certain element that would make you think about the story, and then he'd flip the script, much like Jesus in the parables.

[ 23 : 26 ] He would draw the Pharisees in, and then he would reveal to them something that they had missed. And Paul Harvey does the same thing when he introduces either the name of the person or a crucial element. The same is true here in Romans 1.

If we just left it at this, we would miss the rest of the story. It's just like we famously do with something in Romans 3. The wages of sin are death, but there's something that comes after, and if we miss that part, the gift of God is eternal life.

We've missed that big part of the story. And here in Romans 1, it's not the whole story. There's something that comes later.

Thankfully, Paul is that good storyteller, and he'll follow that up with all that comes in Romans, exposing and looking at this beautiful gift that is Jesus.

Now earlier, I read part of Isaiah 59, but that's not even the whole story either. The Puritans called Isaiah the gospel of Isaiah because of this.

[ 24 : 36 ] What follows what I read in chapter 59 is this. The Lord saw it, and it displeased him. There was no justice. He saw there was no man and wondered why there was no one to intercede.

Then his own arm brought salvation, and his righteousness upheld him. He put on garments of vengeance for clothing and wrapped himself in a cloak. According to their deeds, he will repay. Wrath to adversaries, repayment to his enemies, so they shall fear the name of the Lord from the west and his glory from the rising of the sun. That picture's pretty bleak.

Where's the hope? Where's the rest of the story? It's this. And a redeemer will come to Zion, and those in Jacob who turn from transgression declares the Lord.

What Isaiah captured is that redeemer has come, that God doesn't leave us here in this. He makes a way for us.

[ 25 : 36 ] He sends his own son to take on the righteous punishment that is required by the law. That's bad. It's really bad. It's death.

That those who put their faith and trust in him do not receive that death. for my sin, for your sin, for anyone of us that would believe in him.

Have you, will you, put your faith in Christ? Will you continue to do so, or will you think day by day that I'm really not that bad?

And then the witness of Romans 1 tells us, no, it's you too. It's all of us. Will we see our sin more and more? Will we not grow discouraged by that, but see the glory of Jesus' sacrifice as more beautiful than anything else?

Will we trust him because of that? Now you know the rest of the story. The setting shows us sin is everywhere.

[ 26 : 47 ] He introduces this plot twist to show us we can't escape. None of us can. He concludes, but then doesn't tell us the rest of the story. The rest of the story that Christ has come.

Now we know the rest of the greatest story ever told. Let's pray. Lord, we're thankful for your word in reminding us that we are sinners, but we are not left there.

That you have sent your son to redeem us. Father, if we put our faith and trust in him for the forgiveness of sin, that he has righteously fulfilled the requirement of the law.

And he has truly borne the punishment for our own sin. He died, and he was raised again. May we do that this day.

In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Thank you.