ROMANS PT. 2

The Predicament For All Humanity

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, November 9, 2025
PASSAGES	Romans 1; Romans 2; Habakkuk 2; Leviticus 20; Deuteronomy 17
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:08:15 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Paul does not open Romans with a list of random sins. He is building a case, and the case is that every human being — Jew and Greek, Roman and American — deserves death and is painted into a corner where the only remaining option is grace through faith. That corner is not a threat. It is the place where the gospel becomes good news.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- "The obedience of the faith" only sounds like a contradiction in English. Faith in the biblical sense already carries faithfulness inside it.
- "All the nations" does not mean all the governments. It means every tribe, tongue, people group and family clan — which is why God redeemed a persecutor and sent him to the Gentiles.
- Even Rome — the dominating, oppressive empire of its day — is inside the gospel call. Paul, a Hebrew of Hebrews with plenty to say about what Rome did around Jerusalem, was eager to write to them.
- The first failure in Romans 1 is not indulgence. It is suppressing what was clearly perceived about God through creation. Everything else runs downstream of that exchange.
- "God gave them up" is passive language. God is not making anyone do evil; as a just judgment he stops holding people back from what they have chosen.

- Many of the sins on Paul's list carry capital punishment in the Old Testament — idolatry, sexual immorality, murder, even the extreme case of a rebellious son. That is not incidental to the argument; it *is* the argument.
- In the ancient Near East the maximum penalty was listed first, and the Old Testament itself builds in ransom and redemption for people who deserved death.
- God's kindness is not a free pass. It is an invitation with a direction: repentance.

▶ 1:08:15

Matt picked up where the series left off — the first six or seven verses of Romans — and worked through the rest of chapter one and into chapter two. Before opening the text he returned to a discipline theme: as with Bible reading, prayer can come in binges, but the habit is what pays. He credited Chanica's framing of habits as a team sport and as a gym membership. Miss a week or two and you do not cancel the membership. You just go again.

1. Grace and apostleship, aimed at every clan on earth

▶ 1:10:02

> "...through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ."
>
> ROMANS 1:5–6 ↗

"The obedience of the faith" sounds oxymoronic until you notice that God asks us to come to him on his terms, and that faith is not merely a thought — the word carries faithfulness inside it. And "all the nations" is not a diplomatic category. Matt pressed it down to every tribe and tongue and people group and family clan. God's desire from the beginning was that all the little peoples of the world would belong to him, and he is personally overseeing that commission. The evidence is standing right there in the letter: he redeemed Paul the persecutor and hired him as apostle to the Gentiles.

▶ 1:11:43

Rome, Matt suggested, was the USA of classical antiquity — a dominating force with a long litany of things done to the peoples around it. You could argue it was not a healthy culture. And it is still inside the phrase *all the nations*, which is why Romans 1:7 can address "all those in Rome who are loved by

God and called to be saints." The application travels: those of us in another great empire are likewise loved, and likewise called to the obedience of the faith.

Notice too what Paul wants from the visit he keeps failing to make. He longs to impart a spiritual gift to strengthen them — and then immediately corrects himself into mutual encouragement, "both yours and mine." The apostle of apostles expected to be fed by their faith.

2. The thesis: the righteous shall live by faith

▶ 1:14:17

> "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.'"
>
> ROMANS 1:16–17 ↗

The quotation is Habakkuk 2:4, and Matt heard a double meaning in it he was careful not to overclaim: faith is the manner in which the righteous live all their days, and it is also how they live rather than die. Both, he thought, are intended.

Then comes the pivot. Before Paul can hand anyone that righteousness, he puts all of humanity into one bucket — Jew and Greek together — and argues that every one of us deserves death.

3. What is suppressed, and what follows

▶ 1:16:40

> "For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse."
>
> ROMANS 1:20 ↗

Who is "they"? Everyone who lives on this globe and has experienced the created order. Matt leaned on two words. Paul does not say these things were merely shown; he says they were *clearly perceived*. And the next verse does not say people were supposed to know God — it says "although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him" (Romans 1:21). What follows is an active rejection: the

glory of the immortal God traded for images of mortal man, birds, animals and creeping things — the same inventory scrawled on the temple wall in Ezekiel 8, with the elders of Judah gathered around offering incense to it. Nothing on that list could ever substitute for God.

▶ 1:18:24

Three times Paul writes "God gave them up" (Romans 1:24–28), and Matt insisted on the grammar. It is passive. God is not causing anyone to lust, as though he were making people do evil things. It is a just judgment in which he allows people to indulge what they have already chosen — impurity, dishonorable passions, and finally a debased mind that does what ought not to be done. So the original failure is not the indulgence. It is the suppression of a truth about God that was perceived and known.

▶ 1:20:21

Then the list widens past anything anyone can hold at arm's length: evil, covetousness, malice, envy, murder, strife, deceit, gossip, slander, insolence, pride, boastfulness, disobedience to parents, faithlessness, heartlessness, ruthlessness. Matt imagined running it as an exercise — everyone stands, and you sit down when one of them lands on you. Nobody would be left standing. He paused on gossip: "A lot of gossips don't advertise themselves as gossips. They're just real helpful people who have a lot of prayer requests that they're just relaying." And on the closing line — that they approve of others who practice these things — he wondered whether Paul was wincing at his own history of approving the murder of Christians.

4. Why the list looks the way it does

▶ 1:22:29

This was the section that repays a second reading. Those sins are not arbitrary. A great many of them carry capital punishment in the Old Testament: idolatry in Deuteronomy 17:2–7, adultery and incest and other sexual sin in Leviticus 20, murder in Genesis 9:6 because man is made in God's image, and even the extreme case of the stubborn rebellious son in Deuteronomy 21:18–21. Paul is stacking a multi-layered case across chapters — the capital sins, Adam and Eve barred from the tree of life, and what Matt called the little genealogy of death in Genesis: he lived, he had a son, he lived a while longer, and then he died, and then he died, and then he died.

▶ 1:25:30

Three qualifications kept that from becoming a caricature of the Old Testament. First, in the ancient Near East the maximum penalty was customarily listed first among options, or listed alone with the lesser options implied. Second, scripture itself endorses that reading: Proverbs 19:18 tells parents to discipline a son while there is hope and not to set their heart on putting him to death. As Matt put it,

the maximum penalty exists to kindle the fear of God — "that doesn't mean you're like, 'Hey, you didn't do your chores today. It's go time. Meet me at the city gates.'"

Third, the system has redemption built into it. Ransom for a life that is forfeit (Numbers 35:31–32 names the one crime with no ransom), the guilt offerings of Leviticus 5 and the restitution of Leviticus 6:1–7 for breach of faith, robbery and oppression, and the annual purification of Leviticus 16. Matt added a note from a conversation this summer with Rabbi Dan Milner of the Orthodox congregation in town: there is very little evidence, if any, that Israel made a routine of carrying out these executions — which is exactly what the maximum-penalty convention would predict. Paul's argument survives intact, and it is biblically based. Grace was never invented in the New Testament.

> *"I bet it's not just that there's that one sin that applies to you. If we stopped lying to ourselves, most of them would apply to us."*

5. The judge in the mirror

▶ 1:29:03

> "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."
>
> ROMANS 2:1 ↗

The temptation Matt named is the quiet arithmetic of decency — I was never in al-Qaeda, I buy Girl Scout cookies, I recycle. There should not even be a temptation to it. We are, in his phrase, hardcore in this bucket of depravity, and the word he kept returning to is *need*: not wanting grace, needing it.

▶ 1:30:27

Which sets up the verse that turns the whole indictment around — Romans 2:4, on presuming upon the riches of God's kindness and forbearance and patience, "not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance." Kindness is not God shrugging at the road that leads to destruction. "His kindness is saying, 'You don't have to. I'm inviting you. You may go to this wedding supper of the Lamb.'" Even people off the street. Even the ones hired at the end of the day for a full wage.

6. The day of wrath, and what Paul is hearing when he says it

▶ 1:32:24

Paul warns of storing up wrath "on the day of wrath" (Romans 2:5), and Matt took a short tour of the Old Testament sitting behind that phrase — blood poured out like dust in Zephaniah 1:17, inescapable fire in Joel 2:1–3, the day burning like an oven in Malachi 4:1. Which is probably what John the Baptist has in his ears when he ends a promise of the Spirit with chaff burned in unquenchable fire (Matthew 3:11–12). "Wrath and fury" in Romans 2:8 is the same pairing that shows up in Isaiah 13:9 and Jeremiah 21:5. And in Isaiah 11:4 the same judge strikes the earth with the rod of his mouth and kills the wicked with the breath of his lips — a clear parallel to the sword from Jesus' mouth — while judging the poor with righteousness and deciding with equity for the meek. That is Psalm 37:10–11 as well: the wicked gnashes his teeth and in a little while is no more, and the meek inherit the land.

▶ 1:35:39

So what is the "good" God rewards with glory and honor and immortality (Romans 2:7–11)? Not recycling and Girl Scout cookies. Matt answered it with Jesus' own answer about the work God requires:

> "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."
>
> JOHN 6:29 ↗

The good work is the obedience of the faith — accepting Jesus and believing him for who he really is. Which is the thesis again, from the other side: the righteous shall live by faith.

7. Where that leaves you

▶ 1:37:21

Caught in humanity's predicament, needing help — not almost there, not a coupon short. Everlasting life and peace and glory are a joke from inside that state. If you want to test it, Matt offered a challenge: go find the Garden of Eden on your own. Find that tree. Report back.

"It is by faith and faith alone, because that's the way God wants to give it — for free, by grace." And there is a second bucket. You are not only in the one with the rest of humanity; like Paul, you are in a new bucket of grace, part of the body of Christ, with the dignity of helping every people group come to know Jesus as king. Not only the king of the Jews — "the king of the Chinese, the king of the South Asians, the king of all indigenous peoples, the king of all peoples."

▶ 1:39:24

That is what it means to be unashamed of the gospel. Matt named all three parts he refuses to be embarrassed by: that we all fit in the bucket of depravity and deserve death, that this paints us into a

corner where we require grace, and that the way out is Jesus and his blood alone. Embrace it, live it, share it — with your neighbors and with all the peoples. The service closed with prayer for wisdom to respond, heart ministry teams up front, and a potluck down the hall.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Romans 1:5–6
- Romans 1:7
- Romans 1:11–12
- Romans 1:16–17
- Habakkuk 2:4
- Romans 1:20
- Romans 1:21
- Ezekiel 8
- Romans 1:24–28
- Deuteronomy 17:2–7
- Leviticus 20
- Genesis 9:6
- Deuteronomy 21:18–21
- Proverbs 19:18
- Numbers 35:31–32
- Leviticus 5
- Leviticus 6:1–7
- Leviticus 16
- Romans 2:1
- Romans 2:4
- Romans 2:5
- Zephaniah 1:17
- Joel 2:1–3
- Malachi 4:1
- Matthew 3:11–12
- Romans 2:8
- Isaiah 13:9
- Jeremiah 21:5
- Isaiah 11:4
- Psalm 37:10–11
- Romans 2:7–11
- John 6:29

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Paul says God's attributes are not merely displayed but "clearly perceived." Where have you seen someone — or yourself — work to un-see something about God?
2. Matt argued the first failure is the exchange, not the indulgence that follows. How does that change the way you would talk with someone caught in a habit they hate?
3. Read the list in Romans 1:29–31 slowly. Which one landed on you that you would not have volunteered — and what does it cost you to admit it?
4. Where do you catch yourself doing the decency arithmetic — the recycling and the Girl Scout cookies — instead of needing grace?
5. Romans 2:4 says kindness is meant to lead somewhere. What is one place this week where you have been presuming on God's patience, and what would turning around actually look like?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9a-mjugQnnY&t=4095s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.