

There are portions of the Bible meant to comfort us.

There are portions of the Bible meant to scare the hell out of us – literally.

Today, on Last Judgement Sunday, in Romans 2 we have the latter.

Today Paul gives an unmistakable warning meant to literally scare the hell out of complacent sinners. In Romans 2 Paul warns against a temptation we all face, a temptation to fall into what theologians call carnal security.

Carnal security is the belief that one's moral behavior plays a role in getting you into heaven. It's a very dangerous sin because ultimately, the carnally secure person is trusting in himself (often, just a little bit) to get into heaven – instead of trusting completely in Jesus. It's also dangerous because it's very hard to spot, sometimes even to the person who is slipping into it.

Carnal security looks like this: You have someone who goes to church every week, who says their prayers, who reads their bible, who if you would ask them “why are you going to heaven?” they would say, “because Jesus died for my sins.” So you think they are fine, but on Judgement day when Jesus looks into their heart he is going to see that what they trusted really wasn't Jesus' death, not completely at least. What they really trusted was their own obedience. Their pride was not Jesus alone, but the fact that they were a “good” person, a moral person, a religious person.

Carnal security is finding pride in your obedience and morality. It's a big deal. Jesus himself said once, “**Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons (aka do good things)?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me!’**”

Carnal security is a dangerous thing, and it is the issue Paul tackles in Romans 2. Romans 2 is God's judgement on people who follow all the rules, on the carnally secure, on people almost every observer would call “good”.

Because we are sitting in this church this morning, because many of us are among those “good” people who follow the rules, what we really want to learn from this lesson is how to spot carnal security in us.

Paul tells us there are four signs you might be becoming carnally secure.

The **first** is that you are eager to judge others. The **second** is that you have a twisted view of repentance. The **third** is that you think your Christian life is “good enough.” The **fourth** is that you forget that to whom much is given, much will be expected.

Let's let Paul scare the hell-bringing sin of carnal security out of us this morning. You can follow along on p. 9 of the worship folder.

Rome at Paul's time had a lot of similarities with America today. They were all about being tolerant of other life-styles and life-choices – to an even greater degree than America today though. Prostitution was legal. Homosexuality was common and out in the open. Art work tended to be pornographic in nature. Drug use was wide spread, particularly opium.

Rome was a moral cesspool, and yet in the middle of that a Christian church had sprung up. Through the power of God's word and sacraments these Christians in Rome were living differently than much of the rest of the city. In some obvious ways their lives were more moral. Compared to your average Roman citizen they were “good”.

But Satan has a way of turning virtues in to vices. The “goodness” of these people was tempting them to find pride in their “goodness” rather than in Jesus. They were tempted to slip into carnal security.

In part, Paul writes the letter to the Romans to address this issue.

In Romans 1 Paul lists a whole laundry list of sins, focusing on two of the big ones in Rome - idolatry and sexual immorality (especially homosexuality). It is as if, as he is tearing down homosexuality and idolatry Paul can hear the “good” Roman Christians thinking: “You get 'em Paul! You get those gays! You get those idolaters! Rome is such a toilet! Rome needs more good people like us!” Not realizing that Paul was just setting them up in Romans 1 to knock them down in Romans 2. In Romans 2 Paul switches from condemning sinners “out there” to sinners “in here” – in the church.

Paul writes: **Now we know that God's judgement against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere human being, pass judgement on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape judgement?**

The first sign that you are slipping into carnal security is that you have this eagerness about you to point out the sins of others. You love reading articles that don't just argue against abortion, but mock and ridicule those whose support abortion. You like and share articles that don't just portray the biblical view of homosexuality as one sexual sin among many, but also portray as “disgusting” all those who practice it because you just can't believe that people would live like that.

I'm sure you know people like that... maybe you see some of that in yourself – this love of pointing out how disgusting and wrong the sins of the world are. Why is it that “good” people are so quick to do that?

One of the main reasons is a failure to distinguish between fruit and seed. Sin is like a seed. There is a seed of sin living inside each of us and those seeds produce fruit. That fruit is the different sinful actions different people do.

Paul pointed out some of that fruit Romans chapter 1. He lists not just homosexuality and idolatry. He also listed things like greed, envy, gossip, arrogance, children disobeying their parents, and many more. And then he explains why all of these sins occur. He says, “**They have become filled with every kind of wickedness.**”

Paul is saying that what offends God isn't so much the fruit (the sinful actions), what offends God is the seed (the wickedness that fills people).

Apply that to those major sins that Paul talks about in Romans 1 – homosexuality and idolatry.

Homosexuality: what is the seed behind that sin? Well, lust, right? Add to lust a lack of respect for God's word and the institution of marriage and in some people that will produce homosexuality. In other people, those same seeds will produce other sins. Lust: A heterosexual husband who every night is looking at pictures of women who are not his wife. Lack of respect God's word and his plan for marriage: you have a wife who over a glass of wine with her girlfriends never misses the opportunity to portray her husband as the bumbling, incompetent idiot that Hollywood tells us all husbands are.

The fruit is different but the seeds are identical and it is the seed that offends God.

Or take that sin of idolatry. What is the seed of that sin?

The seed of idolatry is when something becomes the center of your life other than Jesus. It is when something other than God the Father is what makes you feel safe or secure.

That seed is in all of us. It just produces different fruit. In some cultures that seed leads people to carve a little statue out of a hunk of wood and bow down to it and hope that piece of wood can keep the safe and secure and bring meaning and purpose to their lives (and our culture rightly labels that as silly). In other cultures it means that people think and worry about the size of their bank account because they are not going to feel safe and secure unless they have enough money (not realizing that finding your security in a piece of paper is just as silly as finding your security in a piece of wood!).

It is not the shape of the fruit, it is the seed that is offensive to God.

But because we and the Romans distinguish between the seed of sin and the fruit of sin we are so quick to judge others, so quick to condemn others who produce different fruits of sin that we deem to be more offensive than our own, when the truth is, that God sees plenty of offensive seeds and fruit in us.

The first sign that you are slipping into carnal security is that you are quick and eager to pass judgement on the sins of others.

The second sign is closely related to it... It is that you have a twisted view of repentance.

Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance? Because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgement will be revealed.

Paul is speaking to people who go to church every week, who give their offerings, who say daily prayers, who don't go to orgies, or use opium like much of Rome did. Their daily actions, for the most part, were "good." They may have known they weren't perfect, but at least they repented and were trying, right?

That's the problem. Repentance is not an action (like avoiding sins). Repentance is an attitude.

The Greek word that is translated as *repentance* throughout the New Testament literally means *to change your mind*. A truly repentant person is a person who thinks about sin completely differently than the rest of the world does.

So, our world thinks of sins as actions. A husband beats his wife. The sin is the action. Repentance would be stopping that action.

But God says repentance is an attitude – it is a changing of the mind not just changing the action. So even if that husband stops beating his wife that doesn't mean he has repented because if he is still harboring anger in his heart toward his wife God says he may have changed his action, but he hasn't changed his mind. He hasn't repented.

A carnally secure person brings that twisted view of repentance into the church. You don't go to church every week. Repentance means going to church every week. So you end up with a person that goes to church every single week, but they are not truly repentant because all they have done is change their outward action, they have not identified the sinful seed in their heart and repented of that.

The truly repentant person thinks of sin differently. He realizes that because God sees into the heart, all people are equally worthy of God's wrath, regardless of outward behavior. He knows that repentance is more than just changing outward action, it is a heart issue – he sees in his whole heart as something that needs to be forgiven and changed.

Frankly, a carnally secure person is someone who hears this sermon and dismisses it, "This doesn't apply to me, I'm not guilty of that," because they don't see any specific sins of action they need to repent of because this entire sermon and sin of carnal security takes place in your head and heart. They just don't see how this applies because I'm telling you that you could be doing all "good" things on the outside but still be worthy of God's wrath.

That's the second sign – a twisted view of repentance where it is only about outward behavior and not your heart and mind.

The third sign that you are slipping into carnal security is that you have this "good enough" mentality towards your Christian life.

God will repay each person according to what they have done. To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor, and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.

Big disclaimer: Paul here (just like Jesus in Matthew 25) is not teaching works righteousness - that your works save you. He is simply teaching that when God works faith in your heart he is also going to work fruits of faith into your life. So a desire to fight temptation and love like Jesus has loved you is outward evidence that you are among those that God is saving by faith.

He is not saying we are saved by what we do. He is saying that the true Christian is never satisfied with his level of good works. A true Christian persistently seeks to be better.

A true Christian always wants to do more, to give God more – more of his time, more of his money, more of his life. He wants to become more and more like Jesus Christ precisely because the true Christian understands that doing good works is not about trying to get

into heaven, it is about saying thank you to the one who gave us heaven by his suffering and death. The true Christian is never satisfied with “good enough” when he is saying thank you to Jesus.

The carnal Christian is the one who does say “enough.” He says, “I go to church every week. Why do you keep hounding me about going to bible class and sending my kids to Sunday School?”

The carnal Christian says, “I give 10% of my income to the Lord, why do you keep asking for more?”

The carnal Christian is in Paul’s words “self-serving.” Oh, he’ll say he wants to serve God, until what God asks him to do is too hard and too much. The carnal Christian is quick to draw lines. I’m good enough, don’t ask me to do more.

That is the third sign you are slipping into carnal security, friends. When you think that your Christian life is good enough.

The fourth sign: you forget that to whom much is given, much is expected.

There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism.

I’ve mentioned before the rampant racial superiority complex many Jews had. It stemmed from the easy comparison – most Jews were “good” God-fearing people. They were more moral than most of the people around them and that easy comparison made many of them look down on people who didn’t have their lives as put together, people who weren’t clean, moral, and “good.”

To people like that Paul says, “Hold on a second Jews. You were given a lot more advantages than the Gentiles were. You are God’s Old Testament people. God gave you the prophets. God gave you the scriptures. God has been doling out special attention on you for 15 centuries. You don’t get to compare yourself to others who didn’t have those same benefits and feel better because your life is more put together than theirs. No, you and the Gentiles will be judged, but you first, and by a higher stand because God has given you more!”

If Paul was writing this today it might sound like this, “There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the person who goes to church all the time, who knows God’s word well, and says their daily prayers (because they should know better), and then for those who don’t know much about God’s word.”

Paul’s point here is not that some people will get off the hook on Judgement Day. Paul’s point is that to whom much is given, much will be expected.

This is the forth sign – a carnally secure person looks at other “sinners” and feels good because by comparison you are “good”, forgetting that God isn’t going to judge you by comparing you to unbelievers. He is going to judge you by comparing you to the Word he has given you. When you, who know the word of God better than someone else, still do what is wrong, God is going to hold you accountable for that blatant act of disobedience.

When you relish judging other people, when you don’t address the sins of your heart, when you have a “good enough” attitude in your Christian life, when you feel good about yourselves because you don’t do the things that unbelievers do, these are the signs that you are slipping into carnal security.

There are portions of the Bible meant to comfort us.

There are portions of the Bible meant to scare the hell out of us.

This is one of those portions. This is a strong word of warning for people who are “good”. It warns us to be careful that we are not slipping into carnal security.

Here’s the reality my friends – a carnal Christian is a Christian in name only, and they might not even know it. But they will find out when Christ comes again. And if that doesn’t scare you “good” people, I don’t know what will.

Is there any comfort in this lesson? Not really. Romans chapter 1 and 2 are pure law, meant to scare the hell out of believer and unbeliever – out of “bad people” and “good people.” Just a little later in Romans 3 Paul says, **“What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have made the charge that Jews and Gentiles (believers and unbelievers) alike are all under sin... all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”**

The comfort is not in Romans 2 – this is pure law and through the law we become conscious of our sin, we get the hell scared out of us. The comfort is that Romans 2 is one chapter in an entire letter.

After preaching sinners to hell in chapter 1 and “good” people to hell in chapter 2 Paul has some of the most potent words of comfort in the whole Bible in Romans 3: **all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God... all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.**

Justification, grace, redemption – three of the most important words in the entire Bible.

Justification: On Judgement Day, when we stand in that courtroom that Daniel and Jesus described in our other readings, though Jew and Gentile alike deserve wrath, we will be justified – a courtroom term that means *declared not guilty* because of grace and redemption. Even though we are guilty of carnal security, we are declared not guilty because of grace.

Grace: Our Holy God who has been storing up wrath for “good” people like us is also overflowing with grace – undeserved, one-way love. And in that grace, Jesus redeemed us.

Redemption: to buy back. Our Holy God had been storing up his wrath for “good” people like us and in his love Jesus paid that price for us. On his cross he experienced the ocean of God’s stored wrath so that we would never have to experience that.

The law preaches sinners to hell. It reminds us just how sinful our hearts are and always will be no matter how “good” our lives may look. Romans 2 is the law.

But if Romans 2 scares the hell out of you, hear the gospel, the good news: though you have sinned and fall short of God's glory you have been justified by God's grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ.

He died for carnally secure sinners just like you. And because of Jesus, hear God's judgment: There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus! You are not guilty

Amen.