

# GOOD AND BEAUTIFUL GOD SERMON SERIES DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR SMALL GROUPS

3 & 4 JULY 2021

## OUR GOOD GOD LOVES US IN HIS HOLINESS

Scripture: Romans 2:4-12; 3:9-12, 3:21-26

### If you meet weekly :

- Worship through song (10 mins)
- Discussion - 1 session worth of core questions (40 mins)
- Discussion - 1 session worth of additional questions (30 mins)
- Sharing, Prayer, Fellowship (30 mins)

### If you meet fortnightly :

- Worship through song (10 mins)
- Discussion - 2 sessions' worth of core questions (60 mins)
- Optional - additional questions (10 mins)
- Sharing, Prayer, Fellowship (30 mins)

### Core Questions for Discussion

(If your group meets fortnightly, combine Core Questions of two sessions and choose one Further Question from either session.)

**1. One of the purposes of Romans is to assure the readers of the consistency of God's promises and character. In Romans 2 and 3, Paul uses the example of the law to build his argument. Read Romans 2:1-12.**

**1A) Which two groups of people are Paul addressing, and what is God's future plan for each group? (Hint: it's not Jew vs Gentile)**

- The two groups are: those who do evil, and those who do good.
- God is coming in wrath and judgement for the person who persists in sin (vv.5, 8, 9, 12). This divine judgement applies to all who do evil, regardless of whether they are Jews who are under the Old Testament covenant and laws, or are Greeks (= Gentiles = non-Jews) who are not under those laws.
- For the person who perseveres in doing good, God will reward with glory, honour, peace, and eternal life (vv.7, 10). This divine reward likewise applies regardless of whether one is Jew or Gentile (v.10).

**1B) Which of these two groups do we fall in? See Rom 3:9-12 and 3:22-26.**

- By ourselves, we fall into the first group - those who do evil and who are subject to God's righteous judgement. Therefore, we are condemned and will be subject to God's wrath.

- Romans 3:9-12 delivers the verdict of humanity that we are unrighteous (& therefore condemned) before God as due to our sinful nature
  - Romans 3:23 makes clear that all have sinned, all have fallen short before God.
  - When we reflect deeply and honestly upon ourselves, we too acknowledge that we have indeed fallen short. We have not always persevered in doing good (2:7), but instead have been self-seeking and have disobeyed the truth (2:8).
- The only person who falls into the second group - who perseveres in doing good - is Jesus Christ.

### **1C) Which three aspects of God's character are seen from Rom 2:4-12?**

- The first aspect is: God is kind, good, long-suffering, tolerant, and patient. While God is holy and cannot accept evil, He does not execute his righteous judgment immediately. Instead, God is holding back in judgment until a future day of wrath (v.5), and in the meantime God in His kindness and patience seeks to lead sinners unto repentance.
  - "Kindness" here is the Greek word *chrēstotēs*, also translated in Rom 3:12 as "goodness".
- The second aspect of God's character: He is righteous in His wrath and fury against sin and evil (vv.5, 8). God is holy, and refuses to accept sin and evil.
  - God's fairness, justice, and anger against sin – these are all aspects of His holiness as He deals with a fallen world.
- The third aspect: God is always just and fair. God shows no partiality - He will judge rightly regardless of anyone's background (v.11).

#### **Further explanation regarding Romans 2:9-12**

Romans was written to a mature church which was doing well (Rom 1:8, 16:19), to give them confidence in the gospel - so that they would be mission partners with Paul (Rom 15:14-33). The early chapters of Romans are about a righteous God and the good news ("gospel") that we are made righteous ("justified") by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

It is likely that there were several congregations in Rome, which variously comprised Jewish and Gentile Christians - they are addressed together and separately at various points in Romans (1:16, 2:9, 2:17, 11:13). There is some tension between these two groups, likely stemming from the fact the Jewish Christians were expelled (and subsequently returned) from Rome during church history (Acts 18:2, Rom 16:3)

In v.9, "Jew first, then Greek" is likely a reference to how God's covenant was first established with the Jews. However, the more important point Paul is trying to make is this: God is just and impartial (v.11). Both Jews and Greeks (Gentiles) are under sin (3:9), and both can only be redeemed from sin through Jesus' atoning sacrifice (3:23-25).

In v.12, the Law of Moses makes an appearance. "All who sin apart from the law will perish apart from the law" - is about Gentiles having sinned against God even though they are not under the Mosaic covenant.

"In 1:19ff. Paul showed that the Gentile [i.e. the non-Jew] was guilty of a responsible act of rebellion against the Creator; lack of a special revelation did not excuse him. In the same way, lack of revealed law is now seen not to open a way of escape from judgement."

-C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Rev. ed., Black's New Testament Commentary, p.47.

The latter part of v12 is about Jews, who know the law and will be judged according to the law. Essentially - whoever you are, you have sinned and hence you will be judged.

## 2) If God is holy & just, how can God show kindness and forgive, without having us bearing any consequences?

- "Jesus Christ" is the answer.
- But are your group members able to each articulate their understanding of this gospel (i.e, good news) of Jesus' saving work? Here are some crucial points from Romans chapters 2-3.
  - God's holiness means that we are naturally separated from Him due to our inherently sinful nature and love for sin. God's justice means that sin must be punished. The consequences for sin is God's righteous judgment of wrath and fury, and anguish and distress for the sinner (2:8-9). The wages (or reward) for sin is death (3:23).
  - All these consequences of sin do not simply vanish. These dreadful consequences are borne by Jesus as He suffered on the cross and died for our sins. Hence we say that Jesus' suffering and death has propitiated (satisfied) God's wrath (3:25)
  - We are made righteous ("justified") by God's grace, as a gift and not through our own efforts. This gift is received if we place our trust ("faith") in Jesus Christ (3:24-25).
  - When God forgives the guilty, He does not leave the penalty unpaid - after all, God is a just God! And so, Jesus bore the price and took the punishment. As a result, when God forgives us who trust in Jesus, God is "both just (i.e., righteous) and the one who justifies (i.e., makes righteous)" (3:26).

### Some definitions

A) Propitiation: a sacrifice of atonement. It is a sacrifice that takes away wrath. A "wrath-quencher" which satisfies God's anger.

B) Righteousness (used in Romans 3): When we are "declared righteous", it simply means

“to be in right relationship with God”

- Note that elsewhere in the bible, “righteousness” involves right actions as well as relationship to God

**3) Does knowing about the holiness of God encourage us to live differently? Are there areas in which your heart has been hardened to God’s kindness? Is the Lord showing you something you need to repent of?**

- Yes, we should be encouraged to live in obedience to God and pursue holiness. (Recognise that it is challenging as well). God’s grace and kindness is meant to lead us to repentance (v.4), and we should be careful not to despise His kindness or harden our hearts.
- Even though all our past, present, and future sins are forgiven, this does not mean we have a license to sin.
- God’s holiness and us being made righteous changes us in several ways:
  - Firstly, it changes our relationship with God - to be in a right relationship with Him.
  - Secondly, it changes our identity from a condemned sinner to a redeemed child of God. While our nature inherently leads us to sin; by the Holy Spirit, we are able to recognise sin, resist it, and overcome it through the empowering of God. We are made to be holy and are constantly being transformed in holiness through the Spirit. Therefore, we should live holy lives, recognising that this is who we really are as God’s people

**Further Questions for Discussion**

(Optional question for discussion if time permits. Do allocate adequate time for prayer and fellowship.)

**4) How has this discussion helped you better understand the goodness of God?**

- Understanding our sinfulness should give us a bigger appreciation of God’s holiness, and a realisation of the divide between us and God. Subsequently this should help us to see his mercy, grace and goodness.
- Because God is holy and just, He cannot accept the presence of sin and evil.
- A fair judgement for us will result in our condemnation. However, through God’s efforts alone, we are spared from this.
- Jesus’ death on the cross displays God’s glory and goodness in His saving power - He redeems us even though we are undeserving

- We can say with confidence that God is good - knowing that He does not compromise His justice, yet in His mercy, finds a way to reconcile us to Him

### 5) How do we feel about living under a holy God?

- In a world that is so full of injustice (i.e: good people suffer, and evil people prosper) - does this give us hope?
  - This should fill us with a desire for the new creation to come; and a better appreciation for God as a good and holy God who desires perfect justice.
- Are we worried about being held accountable?
  - Remember that while there is punishment for sin, if we trust in Jesus' atoning sacrifice and repent, we need not be fearful about the consequences
  - We can therefore strive to live holy lives in confidence but not in fear, knowing that God empowers us to live in obedience to Him, and also that our sins are fully forgiven.

### 6) Suggested Spiritual Workout: Margin

(For each session in this sermon series, a spiritual workout will be suggested for you to exercise on your own or together as a group. We encourage you to try this spiritual exercise, then share at your next small group meeting how it has impacted you.)

(The following is adapted from *The Good and Beautiful God*, by James Bryan Smith)

Margin refers to the space on the edge of a page where there is no text. Our lives are similar - we can add so much to our schedules that we have no "margin" - no space for leisure and rest and family and God and health. We live in a culture that rewards busyness and overextension as signs of importance. The secret to creating margin? *Just say no*. It's simple, but very difficult to do.

Say no to what? Anything that compromises our spiritual health and the welfare of others. Anything that might put God on the back-burner. These choices are not about good vs bad, but good vs *better*. And what can be better than spending time with God's people and in God's word? What is more rewarding than partnering in God's work of saving souls and glorifying Himself?

It might mean leaving work early to attend Bible study; forgoing that extra 2 hours of studying on a Sunday to serve in church or in your small group (when an exam is on Monday!); or declining that promotion that requires you to work weekends, so that you can spend time with family at church.

It could even mean cutting down service for God (is it necessary to serve on 3 committees at church?) to spend time with your family; or meeting with a non-Christian friend to read the Bible together.

Let me give an example. A young woman who was going through the material in this book was taken by the idea of margin—because she had none—so she set out to create

some in her life. She had schoolwork and a job, so a set portion of her time was already spoken for. She also believed that her family time is valuable, as is prayer, Bible reading and journaling. Finally, she had a boyfriend, and she wanted to invest in their relationship.

However, she realized that her boyfriend took up three to four hours of each day. She prayed about it and realized that their relationship was an area where she could create margin. She told her boyfriend that she wanted to develop their relationship, but she needed at least three nights away from him each week. This would create nine to ten hours of margin.

She later told me how meaningful this decision was. She was able to do better in school, deepen her relationship with God and her family, and go about her day with a rhythm and a pace that made her feel happy and at peace. She and her boyfriend were still able to develop their relationship as well.

Here are some ideas for finding margin:

- Cut out unnecessary entertainment activities - scrolling through Facebook or Instagram or Youtube before you sleep? Why not call a friend to pray or read God's word?
- Explore scaling back some of your commitments by asking - is it essential?
- Get up 10 minutes earlier and create space for spending time in God's word before you begin your day
- Take one lunch out of the week to grab some Christian colleagues and pray together. And if you haven't found any - pray, ask & seek them, God will surely deliver!

## **Prayer Suggestions**

### **7. Consider praying for the following:**

- a) Pray for a deep conviction of sin, a strong understanding that we cannot save ourselves, and for us to soften our hearts in response to God's offer of forgiveness and grace.
- b) Pray for a deeper appreciation of the holiness of God, along with His goodness and mercy. Pray that we will heed God's warnings and respond to His kindness, so we will not have to face God's just and righteous wrath.
- c) Give thanks for the cross and for Jesus who bore the wrath and took our punishment. Give thanks that God's kindness leads us to repentance, and that all who come to Him obtain the righteousness of Jesus, through faith and not through our own efforts.