

## 272 The bad news: The Romans Trap

(N.B. My views here are disputed by 'Ian'<sup>[276]</sup> and I accept I'm probably overstating it here.)

I spotted The Trap as long ago as Dec 2018,<sup>[18]</sup> when grappling with God's wrath. Then it came up again<sup>[57]</sup> when thinking about 'justification by faith'. I started to search for other mentions of The Trap<sup>[70,72,99...]</sup> but there were too many! Clearly, I'm totally obsessed by it.

Why can't I shut up and leave it alone? Because it's *fundamental* to why I was so unhappy with my faith for 50 years, and why I'm so happy now.

I had this nagging feeling that faith was about loving relationship, but no! As we've *always been taught*, it's about crime and punishment (Model A<sup>[266ff]</sup>) – or do you want to tell me I'm wrong?

OK, try this. What is God's wrath about? What is judgment about? What is hell about? What is justification about (letting me off, even though I've done wrong)? **All about punishment.**

So what is Romans all about? I think it's Paul trying to tell the believers-in-Jesus (BIJs) in Rome that the gospel is about loving trust (a.k.a. faith); it's **not about crime and punishment!**

How loudly do I have to say it? (But that doesn't mean I'm right!)

Then again, if I am right, it makes a massive difference to our outlook on life, especially to our unbelieving family and friends.

The Romans Trap? In chapter 1, Paul lists a string of obviously evil, God-rejecting crimes, thereby rabble-rousing the BIJs into saying, 'Yes, yes! Hoorah! God is going to punish those terrible people in the final judgment.' Then Paul utters that fateful word, 'Therefore'...

To whom is Romans written? To unbelievers? No! It's written to BIJs. And so, what do we do with it? We pull out various verses (as detailed<sup>[70,72]</sup>) to prove to *unbelievers* that they stand under the *condemnation* of God. **Crime and punishment.**

This came powerfully back me when I re-read Romans 2:1-11 – I think we've all totally misread it. Here's the passage in the NIV, and my question is: Who is the 'you', in this passage?

1. You[BIJs], therefore, have no excuse, you[BIJs] who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you[BIJs] judge the other, you[BIJs] are condemning yourself[BIJs], because you[BIJs] who pass judgment do the same things.
- 2 Now we know that God's judgment against those[**them!**] who do such things is based on truth.
- 3 So when you[BIJ], a mere man, pass judgment on **them** and yet do the same things, do you[BIJs] think you[BIJs] will **escape God's judgment?**
- 4 Or do you[BIJs] show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realising that God's kindness *leads you[BIJs] towards repentance?*
- 5 But because of your[BIJs] stubbornness and your[BIJs] unrepentant heart, you[BIJs] are storing up wrath against yourself[BIJs] for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.**

Who is Paul saying will suffer wrath? Is it those who do the Romans 1 stuff? No, it's religious people (like me for 50 years) who turn God's *love and acceptance* into God's *wrath and indignation* against unbelievers.

Check your favourite commentary on Rom 2:1-11, but I'm afraid that Tom Wright says of this passage that 'Paul outlines his picture of the final day of judgment', and says that, 'those who live in the dehumanising ways described in the previous passages<sup>[1:18-32]</sup> are courting disaster'.

We are taking what Paul says to *judgmental Christians* ('you are facing God's wrath') and apply it to *people who do evil things* ('they are facing God's wrath'). A total misreading of the passage! (Please tell me if I'm wrong.)

I think it's time that you and I did a bit of repenting, as Paul suggests, lest we face God's wrath for continuing to misrepresent God's love and acceptance of unbelievers (Model B) as God's condemnation (Model A).

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