



Romans 2:1-5

I am not a bumper sticker kind of person but I think one of the best bumper stickers I have ever seen is this one: Visualize Whirled Peas, or its slightly larger cousin: Stop the Violins, Visualize Whirled Peas. These are “New-Agey” kind of bumper stickers, or I should say that they are clever parodies on the New Age mantra of “visualizing world peace.”

But without a doubt one of the worst bumper stickers I have ever seen is this one: My Karma Ran Over Your Dogma. I don't like this bumper sticker primarily because it is meant as a direct attack on Christianity. The karma of Hinduism and Buddhism is supposed to be superior to the dogmas of Christianity. People believe that Christianity has too many dogmas, too many rules and regulations to live by; that we should be freed from these dogmas promoted by Christians and allowed to do whatever we want with our own lives.

But do you see the inherent contradiction in this bumper sticker? The problem is that karma *is* a dogma. Eastern religions are like a religious soup—you can throw just about any belief into the pot that you want, as long as it doesn't resemble Christianity. Hinduism has hundreds of millions of gods so no one on the planet even completely understands Hinduism. But as varied as it is, Hinduism, Buddhism and other Eastern religions all have this in common—they all believe wholeheartedly in karma. You could safely say that karma is their number one dogma. Karma is the belief that guide all other beliefs.

Some might disagree and say that reincarnation is their number one belief but actually, karma is what determines reincarnation. If you live a good life, in the next life you will come back as something better. A broccoli plant advances to a kitten, a kitten advances to a dog (apologies to all you cat lovers, but if reincarnation were true, this would be the natural progression!), a dog becomes a poor person living in the slums of Calcutta and finally, a poor person in Calcutta evolves into Shirley Maclaine. Wait a minute—that's even an insult to cats.

But karma allegedly works in reverse, doesn't it? A wealthy person living in the lap of luxury—if they do lots of bad things—can revert back to a dog or a cat or even the next bug splattered on your windshield. Karma is the all-powerful belief that guides reincarnation. The end goal of eastern religions is nirvana but even this so-called paradise is driven by karma. Good karma will work your way toward nirvana and bad karma will drive you further away.

So don't you dare tell me that your karma ran over my dogma because karma—if it were true—would be the most powerful belief in the universe. Nearly one-third of the world is built upon this belief. The oppressive caste system of India runs on karma and the inhumane treatment of hundreds of millions of their people is justified by karma.

But you don't have to be a Hindu or a Buddhist to believe in karma. I would venture that most people believe in a type of karma, including most Christians. The average guy on the street believes that if you are a good person then good things will happen to you in this life. And if there *is* an afterlife, good things will happen to you there as well.

But here's the really strange and ridiculous issue with karma. This one belief, which is held to by the majority of the world to some degree or another, and is the glue that holds all other religious beliefs together, is nothing but an impersonal force. After all, who is in charge of karma? Who is one who sets all of the other rules about karma? And you must realize that karma does have lots of rules, such as:

- Who or what determines what is good or evil?
- What standard is used to determine good and evil?
- Who keeps track of the good and evil actions of billions of people?
- How many good things are needed to progress toward nirvana and how many evil actions are necessary to move a person backward?

I could list many more rules that must be detailed if karma were true. So do you see, not only is karma the number one dogma of most people on the planet, but this overarching dogma also has endless dogmas underneath it that guides how it works. Karma has *more* dogma than *my* dogma. Now you probably will never see a book, even on the virtual shelves of the mighty Amazon, that describes all of these rules. Do you know why? First of all, no one knows the answers and most importantly, no one cares about the answers. This is the attraction of a belief like karma. Since the rules are not set in stone—literally, like the ten commandments—then it means that you can just make up the rules as you go. And this is really why the average guy on the street gravitates to it in the first place. I can make karma in my own image. I can craft karma to work the way I want it to work, because as we already said, no one really knows how it works. But unfortunately, this is also what Christians tend to do with God. We craft God into our own image. We can make God work the way we want him to work and turn him into a harmless guy who gives you a boost up.

Now here's the bridge I want to make to Romans. Despite the fact that it is undefined and squishy, Karma does have an ultimate standard of justice. Karma *is* an ultimate standard of justice. People who accuse Christians of being judgmental should take a good hard look in the mirror because the karma--or even the quasi karma that they hold to--is also fundamentally judgmental. This "force" makes decisions and moves people in and out of every last life

circumstance. Karma is all-powerful. Karma is deterministic. It may not force you to act in a certain way, but it will always punish or reward the way in which you do act. It is the ultimate standard of justice, but who's in charge of this ultimate standard of justice? As I said before, who or what makes the rules, who keeps track of the rules and who dispenses the judgment and rewards? New-Agers and karma lovers cannot answer this question about ultimate justice, but as Bible believing Christians, you and I can.

If you recall, the second half of chapter one was addressed to Gentile unbelievers. These people do not have the revealed Word in the Bible but are limited to the natural revelation shown forth in nature. They suppress the truth. “They exchange the truth of God for a lie and worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator.” Paul said that such people are “without excuse.” And because they suppress the truth, God gives them over to all kinds of immorality and evil. The list of sins at the end of the chapter is Paul's longest list of sins in any of his letters. We are meant to read that list and think, “Now that's a lot of bad stuff. Those pagans are really evil people, aren't they? Those New-Agers, your unsaved drunken neighbor, the woman at work who is cheating on her husband, your classmates at school who lie and cheat and bully other kids, the old lady on the corner who gossips and is always is the town busybody—these people are really evil. They are really in trouble and they need to clean up their lives.”

This is also exactly how a Jew would have read the first chapter of Romans. As they read Paul's list, their mind would have been filled with the dirty Gentiles who don't have any concept of Yahweh or what he requires. All that "those people" do is unclean. Their entire lives are one continual act of blasphemy. A good Jew could take each of the sins on Paul's list and match them up with one of these Gentiles, just like we tend to do when you and I read this list. A good Jew would get to the end of the list and say to themselves, “God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector” (Luke 18:11).

How does Paul answer such a person who judges other people? Let's read it together.

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. 2 We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. 3 Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? 4 Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? 5 But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

1. Jews—and 'good' people—are all without excuse.

Chapter one was written to the Gentiles but starting in chapter two Paul is speaking to the Jews. Paul knew that a good Jew would have judged the pagan unbeliever and declared him or her guilty. It was into that very mentality that Paul pierced his sword of truth. *Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges.* The man to whom Paul refers is the good Jew, or by extension we could say everyone who see themselves as a 'good' person.

Paul stuck his dagger quickly and deeply into these good Jews with two words—no excuse. Do you see what Paul did here? In chapter one, Paul said that the Gentile pagans were without excuse. If you recall, the word excuse is the *apologetics*, which means a defense. When they stand before the Lord, the Gentiles are without excuse. So the good Jew says, “That's right. You unclean Gentiles have no defense before Yahewh. He declares you guilty!” It was to these self-righteous Jews that Paul declared, *you therefore have no excuse*. In our English translation this is a five word phrase but in the Greek this only took three words: 1)Therefore—2)you have—3)no excuse. Ouch. These Jews would have immediately realized what Paul had done. He had already placed all Gentiles into this category of “no defense” and now he dared to place the faithful Jew into the exact same category. Gentiles: NO DEFENSE. Jews: NO DEFENSE.

2. Jews—and 'good' people—all sin.

On what grounds did Paul lump them all together? *For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same thing*. Do you suppose that this would have been a shocking statement to a Jew? Actually, I don't think it would have been all that shocking. No Jew would claim that they were without sin. They might even reluctantly agree that they had committed some of these sins at some point in their lives.

A faithful Jew knows that he has sinned. He knows that he practices some of the same sins but he would have depended on the fact that he was a Jew under God's covenant. Yes, he sinned occasionally, but his intent to obey the law was good enough. And of course this was infinitely better than the Gentiles not even knowing the law. But Paul does not allow such an excuse. The good Jew and the 'good' person both stand without a defense.

3. God's judgment is according to truth.

Verse two explains why such people are without excuse. *We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things*. In this verse I greatly prefer the KJV as it is much more clear. *But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things*. The key phrase is “according to truth.” God's judgment upon the Jews—and upon all of us—is right because it is “according to truth.”

One of my favorite verses on this topic is in Genesis 18. This is the passage where Abraham is negotiating with God over the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham started the negotiations with 50 people and as God allows, works his way down to ten people. But he began with this statement in 18:25. *Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?*” Abraham was confident that the God who called him out of paganism and into a covenant relationship was a God of perfect justice. Abraham knew that God could only deal with perfect justice and therefore he appealed to God out of this knowledge of perfect justice. “Lord, I know you will do the right thing because you always and can only do the right thing.”

Can you see what a comfort that is? The fact of God's infinite justice allowed Abraham to be so bold and brash in his "negotiations" with God. This would not at all have angered God. Instead, Abraham's prayers would have delighted God because they were based on Abraham's faith in God's justice. Abraham was merely applying this truth in a difficult, real life situation.

Personalizing it a little bit--are you absolutely convinced that the lord always does the right thing in your life? If you had to place the single biggest challenge facing you right now on a table in front of you; if you looked it over and examined all of its nuances and difficulties, could you say, with all of that facing you, that "The Judge of all the earth has done right *by me*"? Like Paul, are you certain that "the judgment of God is according to truth"? You see, it's one thing to believe that God's final judgment and justice will be right but it's something altogether to trust in that in the daily grind and daily trials of life. That his judgment is right, right now, today, at this moment.

And here is where we see the relevance to karma. Karma is an absolute dogma which is judgmental, determinative and loaded down with rules, but all of it is guided by some impersonal, unseen force. Yet most people in the world choose to believe in this invisible force and choose to reject the "Judge of all the earth." They elect to follow a judgmental nothingness but reject the infinitely perfect judge of the universe. And they call us crazy! Do you see the insanity of it all?

The Jews thought they were covered by the covenant and almost everyone else thinks they are covered by karma. But both are wrong. In verse three Paul said that not only is there no **excuse**, but there is no **escape** for such a person.

4. There is no escape for the self-sufficient person.

Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? This is especially hard hitting for the Jew because they know that God is just and his standards are holy—for everyone else. They just don't think it applies to them personally. The Jews would have separated themselves from the heathen Gentiles, believing that one who is born a Jew *will* escape the judgment of God. It is of the utmost arrogance to think that anyone could escape the judgment of God. If you are without Christ, you have no excuse and there is no escape. In verse five, Paul wrote, *But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.* The final judgment of God will fall upon you with certainty.

5. Sin is allowed to remain because of God's long-suffering

But even in the midst of all of this bad news, there are glimmers of amazing hope. This is why sin even still exists. In the verse I just read, Paul said that wrath is being stored up for the final judgment. and just before that Paul mentioned God's kindness, patience, forbearance. Even though the storing up of wrath will lead to judgment if a person does not repent, the good news here is that God is holding back that judgment for now.

But this also means that because of God's longsuffering, sin continues to rage in the world. By withholding judgment God is also allowing sin to continue. This may not sound like a good thing, but it does help to answer the problem of evil. Some cast doubt upon God, because if he were all-powerful and perfectly loving he would not allow evil to remain in the world. People then reject God because, as the argument goes, people do not want to worship a God who is

lacking in either power or love. But here's where God's longsuffering is a good thing. God allows evil to remain out of pure mercy. What some call evil is actually mercy and infinite patience.

Once again, we think God's judgment on sin ought to be like what? Like karma! We think that God should wipe out the bad people as soon as they do evil, or perhaps before they do evil so that bad things can never happen to good people in the first place. Now this is actually what we deserve. We deserve to be immediately wiped out. But instead of immediate and swift wrath, what God gives us is longsuffering.

What would have happened if God had killed Saul when he was responsible for the stoning of Stephen? That would have been the end of the apostle Paul and half of the New Testament. What would have happened if God had wiped out David after his sin with Bathsheba? What would have happened if God had struck down Matthew for his greedy tax collection methods? Or more personally, what would have happened if God had slaughtered you and me before our conversion? God's longsuffering allows sin to remain.

This is exactly what Peter's readers were struggling with.

knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. 4 They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." 5 For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, 6 and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. 7 But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

8 But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9 The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. (2 Peter 3.3-9)

People doubted God because Jesus delayed his coming and therefore, his judgment. Sin in all of its ugliness and pain is still running rampant. But what Peter and Paul are both saying is that this is precisely according to God's plan. Like the Hoover Dam holds back ten trillion gallons of water, so the hand of God holds back his wrath until it is ready to be revealed.

6. God's judgment is delayed to allow people opportunity to repent.

And he holds back his wrath for a wonderful purpose. *Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?* This verse is, at the same time, both a warning and a precious promise. The promise hits us square in the jaw. The *riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance.* Just linger on these phrases for a moment. The riches of his kindness. The riches of his forbearance. The riches of his patience. Each of these are infinite in scope. We could say the infinite riches of his kindness. The infinite riches of his forbearance. The infinite riches of his patience. all of these infinite riches are at our disposal, waiting to be seen and savored in all of their wonder.

Jesus told a powerful parable about the riches of his kindness. The parable of the workers describes men who are hired throughout the day and each of them were hired with the expectation of being paid for their labor. But the owner was generous and even paid those who only worked a single hour a full day's wage.

Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?' (Matthew 20:10-15)

God is rich in mercy. God is generous and we are told in this passage that his generosity has a single purpose: it is meant to lead you and me to repentance. God endures our blasphemy so that we can eventually repent of it. God is patient with our God-hating ways until we finally turn away from those ways and turn to him. God puts up with all of our complaints about his unfairness, our doubts, our messiness and every possible evil so that we have ample opportunity to repent of all of them and trust in Christ alone.

There are two applications to two different sets of people. If you have never trusted Christ alone for your salvation, then the wrath of God is literally stored up and ready to be released and wash you away into everlasting hell. You would stand no better chance of survival than if you stood at the base of the Hoover Dam when it gave away. But even the Hoover Dam is not a sufficient analogy. We just read about the destruction of water in 2 Peter. God destroyed the world by the flood. This was the greatest outpouring of wrath until the second coming of Christ. Noah and his family escaped judgment by getting into the ark. The ark was a type of Christ. Unless you get into the ark of salvation, unless you get into Christ, this wrath will be released on you. God is waiting with infinite patience to give you time to repent, but he also warns you not to be presumptuous on his kindness by refusing to repent.

The other application is to the rest of us who are secure in Christ and do not need to ever fear the wrath of God. But nevertheless, we are still presuming upon God's kindness. We don't think that our sin is really all that bad. We know that God forgives us so we live in a kind of cheap grace where God just walks behind us and cleans up our sin while we go about our merry way. You need not fear the wrath of God, but you are in danger of experiencing his loving hand of discipline upon you. You are in danger of missing out on the glorious wonder of his presence because you refuse to walk with him. You will never experience the riches of his mercy because you presume upon his kindness by your lack of repentance. You cannot experience mercy until you repent and ask God to be merciful to you.

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