

**Sunday, March 9, 2014**

Good morning beloved friends. About a month ago I had the privilege of speaking to you on the topic of Romans 1, and I told you then that I would return to that subject if you gave me half a chance. You might recall that my focus was on verses 16 and 17, specifically the fact that the just shall live by faith. To review:

**Romans 1:16,17 “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.”**

That imputed righteousness, and that faith is the only hope and help that we have beloved. We are only just *because* of that faith, and it was a free gift. We live *by* that faith – with full reliance upon our God – and *because* of that faith. Several expositors make the case that the phrase would be better rendered: “the just, by faith, shall live”. We are only just because of the faith that we have been given, and having that faith, we live – quickened from death unto spiritual life with God.

Now that we have set the proper foundation, and understand the point that Paul is making – which is nothing short of the cornerstone of our doctrine – we can examine the rest of Romans 1 in its proper context. Paul spends the rest of this chapter (and all of chapters 2 and 3) making the negative case – there is no justification through works – no works righteousness – not for the Gentiles, through the Law of Nature, nor for the Jews through the Law of Moses. It is proof positive that we need Jesus Christ, our Savior, **as He is**, not as the depraved human heart would have him to be!

*Matthew Henry: “The apostle, like a skilful surgeon, before he applies the plaster, searches the wound—endeavours first to convince of guilt and wrath, and then to show the way of salvation. This makes the gospel the more welcome. We must first see the righteousness of God condemning, and then the righteousness of God justifying will appear worthy of all acceptance.”*

What follows is a cause and effect analysis of the depravity of the human heart, specifically focusing on the Gentile world. Verses 18 through 23 put forth the cause; 24 through 32, the effect.

**Romans 1:18 "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;"**

The wrath of God – His justice, His vengeance – is revealed from Heaven. It's all around us – this whole decaying creation shows forth the wrath of God to all men, and never more emphatically than when he brings “natural disasters” upon this earth. MHC: “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven in the providences of God, his judgments executed upon sinners, which do not spring out of the dust, or fall out by chance, nor are they to be ascribed to second causes, but they are a revelation from heaven. It is not the wrath of a man like ourselves, but wrath from heaven, therefore the more terrible and the more unavoidable.” That wrath stands against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men. Some people make those two terms to mean the same thing, others distinguish them like this: ungodliness is against those laws of the first table of the law (the first 5 of the Ten Commandments), and unrighteousness is against those laws of the second table. Put another way, it's the difference between our duty toward God, and toward our fellow man. These ungodly and unrighteous men hold, or suppress the truth in unrighteousness. Trapp says this:

*Trapp: “[They] Hold the light of their conscience prisoner (which is as a prophet from God). The natural man, that he may sin the more securely, imprisons the truth which he acknowledgeth, and lays hold on all the principles in his head that might any way disturb his course in sin, locking them up in restraint.”*

**Romans 1:19 “¶ Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.”**

Those fundamental notions about the existence and nature of the sovereign God are imprinted upon the hearts of all men. Strong's defines manifest as “apparent, evident, plainly known”.

**Romans 1:20 “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:”**

Where God and his attributes are not directly visible to us in this flesh, His works most assuredly are. Gravity is invisible to us, and yet we understand its power, because we see its effect all around us. His power and Godhead are both seen IN the creation, and SINCE the creation, thereby making every son and daughter of Adam without excuse when they transgress against him, and they will be held accountable.

*Matthew Henry: “The workman is known by his work. The variety, multitude, order, beauty, harmony, different nature, and excellent contrivance, of the things that are*

*made, the direction of them to certain ends, and the concurrence of all the parts to the good and beauty of the whole, do abundantly prove a Creator and his eternal power and Godhead."*

**Romans 1:21 "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened."**

To glorify him AS God, is to continually acknowledge his sovereignty, and to submit in humble obedience to his revealed will. Anything other than that is to be unthankful, and to therefore vainly imagine that your human notions of righteousness are in some way better than God's.

*Calvin: "Having forsaken the truth of God, they turned to the vanity of their own reason, all the acuteness of which is fading and passes away like vapor. And thus their foolish mind, being involved in darkness, could understand nothing aright but was carried away headlong, in various ways, into errors and delusions. Their unrighteousness was this—they quickly choked by their own depravity the seed of right knowledge, before it grew up to ripeness."*

**Romans 1:22 "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,"**

Beloved we are well familiar with the endless babbling of those who search out and profess worldly, fleshly wisdom. There is no soundness in it – they build luxurious palaces of logic upon foundations of sand. How foolish!

**Romans 1:23 "And changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things."**

The incorruptible, immortal, unchangeable God, in great kindness, created man after his own image. Man, having fallen through sin into wickedness, corruption and mortality seeks to make God after his own vile image, or even after the image of some creature lower than man. Paul wrote these words to people living in Rome, who were thoroughly familiar with idol worship, and people creating gods after the image of every manner of creature or thing under the sun ... including the sun! I would submit to you that such idol worship pales in comparison to the deceitful, treacherous efforts of Satan to steal the sovereignty of our God, and pervert his glorious attributes by creating a new version of God – a counterfeit gospel - using the NAME of God.

We could give an infinite number of specific examples of how depraved humans are unthankful, and therefore depart from the true worship of God, setting about to define their own version of righteousness. I'll give you one such example – the first instance of it, in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve had all of the brilliant light of creation bursting forth in them, and around them. They had clear knowledge of their Creator, and his blessed commands. Then that subtil, crafty serpent Satan came upon the scene, hissing out lies against God and his sovereignty.

**Genesis 3:1-5 “Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.”**

Eve, and then Adam, ate that fruit, thereby showing their un-thankfulness to God. They bought in to Satan's deceit – they vainly imagined that in fact they would be as gods, and therefore should have some say in deciding what is good and evil, what is righteousness, rather than thankfully, humbly submitting to God's clearly declared standard. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. Sin and depravity had entered into the heart of man – immortality turned to mortality, life turned to death, incorruption turned to corruption, innocence turned to guilt. In short, the fall happened. That, my friends, is what I believe the next section of Romans 1 is describing: The working of depravity upon every human heart, as a result of unthankful idolatry. This cause and effect process of depravity started with the fall, and recurs in the heart of every son and daughter of Adam that has been, and will be born on this earth. As righteous punishment for their betrayal, God has given up all of depraved mankind. You will see 3 times in the next 5 verses that God “gave them up” to be preserved – pickled – in their sins. Be clear that when you see "they" and "them" in verses 24-32, it is all of unthankful, idolatrous, reprobate mankind as described in verses 18-23. Strong's definition for “gave up” includes this: “to deliver up one to custody, to be judged, condemned, punished, scourged, tormented, put to death”. This giving up, is a judicial condemnation, such that their punishment for sin is to be led into more and worse sin.

**2Peter 2:9 "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished:"**

*Matthew Henry: "God gave them up, in a way of righteous judgment, as the just punishment of their idolatry—taking off the bridle of restraining grace — It is no new thing for God to give men up to their own hearts' lusts, to send them strong delusions, to let Satan loose upon them, nay, to lay stumbling-blocks before them."*

**Romans 1:24,25 "Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen."**

Strong's on uncleanness: "the impurity of lustful, luxurious, profligate living."

Strong's on lust: "concupiscence, craving, longing, desire for what is forbidden."

This uncleanness includes a broad range of conduct. It is certainly inclusive of every stripe of sexual immorality, but it goes well beyond that. It's the very picture of Hedonism – "if it feels good, do it". Beloved, our hearts are daily vexed with the audaciously filthy behavior and conversation of this wicked generation, such that we know by experience that there is no end to the ways the depraved human heart can concoct to dishonor their own bodies.

**Romans 1:26,27 "For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet."**

Strong's on vile: "dishonor, shame, disgrace."

Strong's on affection: "inordinate affection, lust, depraved passion."

Here again, vile affections is a concept that includes many sins, but we get an exemplar of a particular sin – Sodomy. Paul uses this example to show just how far the depraved, condemned human heart will go. Not only is this a grievous sin against God, but it is wholly unnatural, and is an abomination before him. It is a sin that those in the church of Rome would have been very familiar with, because it was prevalent in that godless Roman culture, such that (according to JFB) new words were being coined for the sexual acts that Tiberius Caesar was committing. It's the proverbial "bottom rung on the ladder of depravity", which makes it a fitting example for Paul to continue making his point that these gross sins are the inevitable and fitting end result, when men thanklessly abandon God and turn to idolatry. We know from such examples as Sodom and Gibeah that when a society has become so collectively hardened that they call this

abominable sin a holy thing, that their destruction is right around the corner – it is a harbinger – a symptom of a deadly raging cancer.

This is the just, fitting reward that God gives to the faithless, depraved, idolatrous human: the recompense of their error which was meet. How fitting is it that mankind has bowed down in idolatrous worship to every form of beast, and God has now given them over to abominable sin that even beasts wouldn't commit. Be clear, my friends, this sin is the symptom, not the cause. Anyone that turns from the righteousness of God, and counts upon their own depraved human heart, and works, will end at this same place.

**Romans 1:28 "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;"**

*Matthew Henry: "They did not retain God in their knowledge, because they did not like it. They would neither know nor do any thing but just what pleased themselves. It is the temper of carnal hearts; the pleasing of themselves is their highest end. There are many that have God in their knowledge, they cannot help it, the light shines so fully in their faces; but they do not retain him there. They say to the Almighty, Depart, {#Job 21:14} and they therefore do not retain God in their knowledge because it thwarts and contradicts their lusts."*

"Did not like to retain" is a passive understatement, in fact they work hard to expel any proper notion of God from their minds, and to convince others to do the same.

Strong's on reprobate: "Rejected; castaway; unfit; spurious; not standing the test; not approved."

*Matthew Henry: "Answerable to this wilfulness of theirs, in gainsaying the truth, God gave them over to a wilfulness in the grossest sins, here called a reprobate mind, a mind void of all sense and judgment to discern things that differ, so that they could not distinguish their right hand from their left in spiritual things. See whither a course of sin leads, and into what a gulf it plunges the sinner at last; hither fleshly lusts have a direct tendency. Eyes full of adultery cannot cease from sin, #2Pe 2:14. This reprobate mind was a blind seared conscience, past feeling"*

*Gill: "A vain empty mind, worthless, good for nothing devoid of all true knowledge and judgment; incapable of approving what is truly good, or of disapproving that which is evil; a mind that has lost all conscience of things."*

This perverse, reprobate mind chases after things that are not convenient – not becoming, not fitting. Paul proceeds now to give a partial list of such sins.

*Calvin: "As he had hitherto referred only to one instance of abomination, which prevailed indeed among many, but was not common to all, he begins here to enumerate vices from which none could be found free: for though every vice, as it has been said, did not appear in each individual, yet all were guilty of some vices, so that every one might separately be accused of manifest depravity. As he calls them in the first instance not meet, understand him as saying, that they were inconsistent with every decision of reason, and alien to the duties of men: for he mentions it as an evidence of a perverted mind, that men addicted themselves, without any reflection, to those vices, which common sense ought to have led them to renounce. But it is labor in vain so to connect these vices, as to make them dependent one on another, since this was not Paul's design."*

**Romans 1:29-31 "Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful:"**

I'm not going to spend any time delving into each of those sins, for the most part, they are self explanatory, and because Paul's purpose in listing them was to show just how inescapable human depravity is without the intervention of the Holy Spirit through the blood of the Lamb. If you don't see your own sins somewhere in that list, then you're fooling yourself; which brings us to the punchline:

**Romans 1:32 "Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them."**

Paul has shown clearly that every human knows the judgment of God – it is written upon the hearts of man. Likewise every human knows that the penalty is death – that death being eternal death; hell. That knowledge is an aggravating factor of sin before God! It shows the hardness of the human heart to know plainly what is required, and yet resolutely continue on a course of sin. It is further violence against God that the sinner would defend, justify, and encourage sin in others – actively, or passively.

*Matthew Henry: "Now lay all this together, and then say whether the Gentile world, lying under so much guilt and corruption, could be justified before God by any works of their own."*

Each of us is worthy of that eternal death and damnation, in our depraved condition. Again, Paul's whole point in laying out this argument is that our works can in no way bring us to salvation – only through faith – only through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and his atoning blood that was spilled, do we have hope: Hope that the Holy Spirit interrupts this process of depravity, and shows us our awful condition, and our desperate need for the Lord. Let's return for a moment to Adam and Eve. After the fall, they became acutely aware of their nakedness, and their need for a covering – a metaphor of their (and our) need for a savior. They immediately set about to sew together some fig leaves – hoping to create their own covering, their own righteousness, their own salvation from their own works. Of course there can be no such salvation, but rather the blood of the Lamb would have to be shed, and so the Lord shed blood, in order to make them a covering of animal skins, and thereby teach them their need of Jesus Christ.

My friends – we are in continual danger of falling into the trap of works righteousness – in our hearts, in our words, in our doctrine. It is a deadly snare that Satan continually lays before us, tempting us – deceiving us – that we would fall into it. The fact is, that a person appearing to be a servant of God today, may be lifted up in pride and cast off tomorrow. On the other hand, an enemy of the church of God today, could be brought low by the Lord, and be a humble servant tomorrow. Today's Saul of Tarsus may well be tomorrow's Paul. These are sober matters, beloved. Let us keep that sobriety, that gravity, that humility continually before our eyes in everything that we do as we set about to sound a bold and faithful warning to this wicked generation, lest we be lifted up in pride, and turn from the only righteousness that we could ever hope to have.

**1 Corinthians 6-9:11 "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."**

I love you all. Amen.