

The Power of the Gospel  
Romans 1:16-32

1 Corinthians 15:1-28

James 2

Responsive Psalm 67

Picking up this week where we left off last in Roman's chapter 1. Let us go ahead this morning and read the last half of this chapter starting in verse 16. Last week we focused upon the message of the gospel, it's importance and influence upon the wider society and how we, as Paul stated should not be ashamed of it. For within the gospel itself is the only hope for mankind to escape the darkness and hopeless nature of this lost and sinful flesh. Paul himself being changed by God, understood the power of God's word in the hearts and minds of people. The Gospel is not just some mere rhetoric, or ritual but is the life and light found in Jesus Christ. This Gospel is the one which was established since the beginning, inline with the teachings of the law and the prophets, and proven by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The gospel and the promises of the new covenant create a shift of perspective within Jesus Christ. The old covenant law was a system of judgment, and with such judgment came shame. The penalties for law breaking was severe, designed as a deterrent, pointing to the fact that no man is able to reach a level of holiness required by God. Therefore Israel lived in shame, always falling short of the glory of God, incurring the wrath of God for disobedience. We see over and over throughout the old testament the judgment of God upon Israel for their disobedience.

With the breaking of the law, came guilt and shame, requiring the shedding of blood as a remission. Throughout the old testament we see a bloody reminder of Israels failure to follow God's law showing that something more is needed, that mankind needs a messiah to free them from God's wrath, for they are not able to do it themselves. But now Christ has come, and offered himself once and for all so that all who believe upon him may have remission of sin and be found Holy and righteous in the eyes of God. Not of anything that we have, or could do of ourselves, but of Christ alone, who by the shedding of his blood upon the cross imputed his righteousness to our account, covering once and for all the sins which have held us captive for so long and which the blood of bulls and goats was not able to cover. In the new covenant of God, there is no longer shame, and guilt, but rather a remission of both, for our hope is not found in our attempt to remain righteous, but is instead established in righteousness through faith in the one and only Jesus Christ. This statement of Paul's "for I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ." has within in it a 2 fold meaning, first and obviously is the gospel itself, Paul is not ashamed to share, and to minister this gospel knowing that within it is mankind's only hope to be right with God. And likewise, the gospel takes away the shame and guilt of sin, where Paul no longer has to be ashamed before God because of the work of salvation done by Jesus Christ on the cross.

Not only is the remission of sin through Christ is promised throughout scripture, but also the removal of guilt and shame. I want to just take a few moments to point out a few verses which talk about this reality, and such verses are a good reminder to us, that we may rest in for they speak of our state in God, no longer living in guilt and shame because of our inability to please God through the keeping of his law, but rather now being in a state of forgiveness through the work of his son.

Isaiah 43:25 “ I, I am the one who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will remember your sins no more.”

Romans 8:1” Therefore, now there is no condemnation for those who are in union with Christ Jesus our Lord.”

1 John 1:9 “God is faithful and reliable, if we confess our sins, he forgives them and cleanses us from all unrighteousness.”

Jeremiah 50:20 “in those days, says the Lord, no sin will be found in Israel or Judah, for I will forgive the remnant I preserve.”

Jeremiah 33:8 “I will cleanse them from the iniquity by which they have sinned against me, and I will pardon their iniquities by which they have sinned against me, and by which they have transgressed against me.”

Hebrews 8:12 “And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins.”

Our hope and our salvation is found within the one and only Jesus Christ, and it is by the gospel message that one may hear and come to believe, and through Christ may find peace with God, having their sins forgiven and forgotten no longer hearing shame and guilt before God, but instead rejoicing in Christ, living in the hope of these new covenant promises that God has established. Paul recognizes the power and importance of the gospel in bringing salvation to a humanity that is lost, and undone. To quote Tom Holland in his commentary of Romans, he says, “Paul is using the historical situation of the Jews in exile as his model here, for he sees that event as a type of humanity. He says that humankind is in bondage, alienated from God and in a desperate situation. Indeed, mankind's situation is far more dire than the Jews in Exile, and exile that resulted from their own disobedience to God's word. Paul sees the the whole of humanity is cut off from it's creator and under the control of Satan and that is no way out, the situation is dire. The judgment that will come upon Satan will also come upon the human family, for it is foolishly accepted Satan's lies about God and has therefore become a part of Satan's rebellion, leaving the outcome that humanity is at enmity with God.” Therefore we must be bold in the gospel of Jesus Christ, for it is the only message able to set a captive humanity free.

Verse 18 and on shows the state of humanity, bringing to the forefront the importance of the gospel ministry that we are to unashamedly share. We have this dichotomy, of the just and the wicked in verses 17, and 18, the righteous shall live by faith, and the wrath of God is being revealed among the wicked. Mankind without God is under the sentence of God's wrath. This is not to say that God is angry in some rage filled uncontrollable way, but rather it is judgment for rebellion against the creator. God created mankind in his image, for his glory, when mankind rebels against God's purpose and glory, he is thereby incurring the punishment of God for himself. Unbelief, in the very one who not only has caused you to exist, but sustains your existence is a callous rebellion, a denial of reality, and a delusion of a sin sick heart and mind. If God were to not judge those who have rebelled against him, he would not be righteous, he would not be holy, therefore he would not be a God worthy of our worship. The ultimate punishment from the rejection and rebellion of God is death, and either Christ has taken that punishment for you, or you are still lost in your sins and rebellion and will suffer the just and holy wrath of God yourself. God can no merely look away, or let slide blasphemy against his holy name, he can not ignore the rebellion of his creation who bend, twist, and distort, reveling in evil and perversion using the very world and nature he has given to blaspheme against him who has created it for his purpose and glory.

We as humans have a basic understanding of this justice and need for it. Our nature cries out for it, wanting to see justice is part of who we are. Most of our stories, our movies, and our entertainment deal with the issue of justice, because it is a base part of who we are. But even that sense of justice can be distorted in our sinful nature, our desire for justice is not the same as God's who is perfect, blameless and holy. In example given to show God's righteousness and justice in the judgment of sin uses our court system. The argument is that likewise within our own society and court system it would be unjust and shameful for a judge to excuse a convicted murder and pedophile and set them free back into society with no justice or punishment for crimes committed. Yet oddly enough that is what we are seeing in our own society today, our sense of justice has been distorted, and twisted in our continual rebellion against God, making the unjust judgments out to be holy and right, and the righteous judgments to be bigotry and blasphemy. We see a celebration of perversion, there are many who judge such as the moral and right ground to stand upon, and those who speak out against it, those who warn of God's wrath being poured out upon not only those who practice, but those who approve of are being marked as bigots, and evil, a danger to society.

In a new level of rebellion against God, even our sense of righteousness and need for justice has been twisted and turned upon those who stand for truth. Even the word truth, has now been considered by many to be a trigger word, or hate speech. Paul's argument that he is laying out here in this chapter is that sin itself destroys humanity. The twisting corruption of it drives humanity further away from God's purpose and is at abject rebellion against the very one who created us. As God's created beings, we have an obligation to him, we have been made for his glory, to praise and worship, yet in our sin we do the opposite, therefore incurring the wrath of God. The root of sin, is mankind's attempt to usurp the authority of God, that is exactly the sin of Adam, to seek to be like God, to consider ourselves equal, which is the root of the sinful desire and nature within us. We seek this authority to justify out flesh and excuse our action and our attitudes as being mature, liberal, and enlightened. No matter how you cut it, sin is a rebellion against God's created order and purpose, no matter how culturally acceptable and reasonable it may appear to be. God can only have one answer against such rebellion, one of hostility and wrath, for if he would have any other attitude toward the sinful rebellion of mankind it would mean that he had surrendered to Satan. He would be helpless and unable to deal with the tyranny of mankind's nature. For God to be just, and holy, he must judge sin according to his righteousness, therefore he must by this own nature of righteousness judge mankind.

Paul is warning here, that the wrath of God is coming upon all those who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. In light of our modern ideas and sensibilities this is a frightening statement. For not only have we distorted what is justice, we have now also distorted what is truth. We now live in an age where truth is relative, or rather, it is believed to be relative for it is seen as nothing more than personal opinion. We hear phrases such as..."I must speak my truth." Or I must be my true self, when in fact you are in denial of your true self. We now have this idea that what is true from one person, may not be true for another, there is no longer a concept of absolute, irrefutable truth, it is all perspective and conjecture. A society which rejects even the concept that truth can be known, and truth is subjective not objective is a society lost in the deception of Satan. This is the grand deception of today, equating truth with opinion, or fact with conjecture. But this is not something that is new to just today, for we saw it with Satan's deception of Adam and Eve, and we see it here in this passage as well.

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world his invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that we are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.”

The suppression of truth seems to have become an art-form today, lies, manipulation, deceit, is what rules, and if you say otherwise it is you you have become the problem. We are seeing the deception of Satan play out in our own society, the rejection of truth, leads to all kinds of perversion and sin. It is the root cause that Paul lays forth here in this chapter, because they have suppressed the truth of God in their hearts, he has given them over to their sinful nature, has given them over to their lusts, so that they may burn in their desires and in seeking fulfillment find only hopelessness and despair. Believing themselves to be the arbiter of truth, believing themselves to be gods who can determine their own right and wrong, and their own truth, falling into the same sin as Adam, rejecting the truth, and the authority, of their creator, therefore they reap the judgment and condemnation to themselves. If we are to take what Paul is saying here as true, the penalty due to all those who reject God, who do not revere him as God, is a life defined, by sinfulness which only brings with it darkness and death. Paul describes these sinful desires and behaviors but in them is also the penalty for the can not escape the sin which condemns them for they have rejected the one and only true salvation.

Therefore they are as Paul says, filled with unrighteousness, it is what defines them, it has intrinsically become who they are, rejecting God, rejecting truth, they become sexual immoral, wicked, covetous, malicious, full of envy, they murder, cause strife and deceit, their hearts and minds seek after evil, they whisper and plot deception and evil, they manipulate and back stab for their own gain, and for their own pleasure, they become proud and arrogant in their deception and lies, boasting of their sin, celebrating their rebellion against their creator, they create new ways to deny God, they are rebellious, unloving, unforgiving and unmerciful, For they are receiving in themselves the penalty which is due. And as Paul follows up and says, not only is it these who have rejected God, who's lives are the manifestation of that rejection, it is also those who approve of them who is likewise deserving of the same death. For approval of such is nothing more then another form or rejection of God's nature, design, and order. It is a rejection of God, and an acceptance of the rebellion against him.

Both those who do, and those who approve will reap the punishment for their actions, Paul says such is deserving of death. This here is not just a mere dying in the physical sense, but also of the spiritual, all those who as Paul wrote, do not glorify him as God, will be cast into outer darkness. The action of the sin is less of the issue then the heart that performs it. A heart and mind that rejects God, will perform sinful rebellious acts, as it is simply the nature of mankind to do so. Which is exactly why we need a savior, to break through our cycle of rebellion and sin, and bring us a new life in him. And this brings us back to last weeks message, as to why we must not be ashamed of the gospel for it is the only thing that has the power of God to salvation. Having our identity resting solely on Christ's death, burial and resurrection is the only escape we have from the shackles of sin. And as Christians, we are to be a living sacrifice and example of the changing power of the Gospel of God. And I think with that should come compassion and concern over the lost world.

For without the gospel ministry, many will perish into this death that Paul spoke of, not only those who practice rebellion and lawlessness, but likewise those who approve of it. The reality is, there is no half way point, you are either God's, justified and holy through the blood of Jesus Christ, or you are Satan's, still in your rebellion seeking to justify your flesh and desires. And the call has gone out, repent, believe, lay down your rebellion and sinfulness and take on the tender mercies of Jesus Christ. We must stand firm in the love of Jesus Christ upon this gospel, for in it, is the power of God to salvation. And a reminder to those of us who are his, what he has done, that our sins have been covered, paid for, and eradicated through his blood. No longer laid to our account, we are free from the penalty of them. And I think, as we minister we must remember compassion, for we to were no different, and still while in this body wrestle against the flesh. I have seen far to many Christian brothers and sisters using the word of God as a bludgeoning hammer instead of a sword, looking to beat morality into the body instead of cutting directly to the heart.

God is about the business of saving his people, and he has chosen to do so through the foolishness of us ministering the gospel to the lost and dying world. And as we see the world dying, we should all the more be drawn with compassion to minister healing through the word of God. For It is, is the power to save, an escape from despair, and a rest beyond all comprehension. May God be pleased to bring ever more into his family, and may be he pleased to use us as his instruments to do so.