

Romans 1:1-7 by Brian Bill

ROMANS SERIES

(Note: Exposition not available on some passages)

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Romans 1:1-7 A Call to Obedience - 3/12/06

A rebellious man, who had been living out the lusts of his flesh, finally started feeling like there had to be more to life. He had been doing some things he knew were wrong but he was caught in a web of wanton living and didn't know how to break free. One day, as he was weeping in a garden, he heard some children from these words: "*Pick up and read. Pick up and read.*" Having a copy of the New Testament nearby, he opened it up at random and read these words from Romans 13:13-14 (**note**):

Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

Listen to what he said happened after he read these words:

No further would I read, nor had I any need; instantly, at the end of the sentence, a clear light flooded my heart and all the darkness of doubt vanished away.

A religious man, who was a Theology Professor, had been going through acts of penance and self-sacrifice as he tried to please what he considered to be a terrible judge. No matter how hard he worked, salvation seemed elusive to him. In his study one day he came to these words in Romans 1:17 (**note**):

For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'

Commenting on his own conversion that took place as a result of this verse, he wrote these words:

Night and day I pondered until...I grasped the truth that the righteousness of God is that righteousness whereby, through grace and sheer mercy, he justifies us by faith. Thereupon I felt myself reborn...When I understood that and when the concept of justification by faith alone burst through into my mind, suddenly it was like the doors of paradise swung open and I walked through...This passage of Paul became to me a gateway to heaven.

The rebellious man was none other than Augustine in the 4th Century and the religious man who finally grasped the righteousness of God was Martin Luther, who launched the Protestant Reformation which literally changed the history of the western world. Luther said that Romans is

The chief part of the New Testament, and the very purest gospel, which, indeed, deserves that a Christian not only know it word for word by heart but deal with it daily as with daily bread of the soul. For it can never be read or considered too much or too well, and the more it is handled, the more delightful it becomes, and the better it tastes.

John Calvin wrote:

When anyone gains a knowledge of this epistle he has an entrance opened to him to all the most hidden treasures of Scripture.

The English poet, **Samuel Coleridge**, referred to Romans as,

The profoundest piece of writing in existence.

The noted scholar **F. F. Bruce** once said:

There is no telling what may happen when people begin to study the Epistle to the Romans.

William Tyndale, who translated the Bible into English, believed that every Christian should memorize Romans. **John Chrysostom** used to have someone read Romans over him twice each week. After hearing it read so many times, he said this:

Romans is unquestionably the fullest, deepest compendium of all sacred foundation truths.

Frederic Godet, a Swiss theologian, said:

“Every movement of revival in the history of the Christian church has been connected to the teachings set forth in Romans...and it is probably that every great spiritual renovation in the church will always be linked, both in cause and effect, to a deeper knowledge of this book.”

Lest we think that these stories just happened long ago and far away, I heard of one man who visited a church service recently where the pastor was preaching through Romans. At the end of the service, the person sitting next to him asked him how long he had been a Christian. To which the young man responded, “*About ten minutes.*” One of our newest church members attributes a verse in Romans to his conversion and two weeks ago, when Eric Elder spoke to the students, he told them that God used Romans 1 to free him from the bondage of homosexuality.

I pray that that we will see a number of conversions and recommitments during our study together and that God will bring a wave of repentance and revival to us at this time and at this place for His glory and for our good.

You may wonder why we are studying Romans right now. I have waited almost seven years here before preaching through Romans. I have thought about it many times but have backed away from the task because I haven't considered myself adequate to the task. Don Grimes has asked me for months when I was going to tackle Romans. My friend **Ray Pritchard** challenged me to preach through this profound book. But I kept putting it off. What could I add to the great preaching that has already been done in Romans, including a series by Pastor Frank Beatty preached here at PBC many years ago? But then the Holy Spirit made it clear to me in a way that I couldn't resist. Here are some reasons why we are going to roam through Romans.

- Over the last several years many new believers have made PBC their home. In order to grow to maturity, the Bible says that we must move from milk to meat. It's time to move from the shallow waters to the depths of God's Word.
- Magnificent explanation of Christianity. Every vital teaching is found in capsule form. Donald Barnhouse said,

“Romans has the most complete diagnosis of the plague of man's sin, and the most glorious setting forth of the simple remedy.”
- This will make a good follow-up to our just completed Old Testament Journey. You may be surprised to know that Paul quotes from the Old Testament 69 times in this letter.
- The final reason is that Beth and I met in a Romans class at Moody Bible Institute and this book had a lot to do with bringing us together.

One of the reasons I've put off preaching through Romans is not only its depth, but also its length. While some pastors have plowed through verse-by-verse with no breaks, we're going to spend time in a section of Romans and then we'll study some other Scripture and then we'll come back to Romans, until by God's grace, we finish it.

Martin Lloyd Jones spent 13 years preaching through Romans and only made it to chapter 14 before he died. He preached 29 sermons just on the first chapter! We're not going to go that slowly but we are going to take enough time to plumb its depths.

We're going to focus on Paul's introduction this morning, recognizing that in the Greek, Ro 1:1-7 is really one long sentence. Keep in mind that Paul is writing to a church he had never visited before so he takes some time to lay the groundwork for what is to follow. Look at Ro 1:1: (**note**).

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God.

We can see from this verse that we must...

1. Know who we are and what we're called to do. Paul could have written his resume or provided them with his amazing pedigree. He didn't focus on his great preaching or his abilities or his background. He identified himself in three ways:

- Servant.**

It's significant that the first title Paul gives himself is that of servant. A slave is one who had nothing of his own because everything belonged to his master. Literally it means one who's life and will was swallowed up in the will of his Master.

- Sent.**

Separated.

A couple weeks ago I asked the women in the Tuesday Bible Study to write down what God is teaching them. Someone handed me a note this past Sunday that reads in part:

“Because of God’s Word and this women’s Bible Study, I’m facing sin that I don’t like to call my own! I wanted to stand up and shout, ‘God, deliver me, your Temple -- clean my heart that it may be pleasing to you all the rest of my days,’ when you were preaching about God dwelling in the hearts of believers. It shakes me up so much that I am in the Word everyday now (for the last four weeks), usually more than an hour.

My biggest heart’s cry is ‘God renew my mind. I want to serve you with all my mind!’ While I have been praying and reading the Bible, God brought to mind TV and movies. He said, ‘Give them up.’ I was making them a passive idol and God was jealous of that. So week two of our Bible Study I prayed and asked the Holy Spirit to help me. I went to my movie collection and picked out each movie that was not pleasing to Him.

Following God in obedience has literally made me free. Now I want to give Him everything and see His work in my life!”

Romans 1:8-17 Finding Your Purpose - 3/19/06

I read a story in the recent issue of *Christianity Today* about a high-profile pastor in Tulsa, Oklahoma, who started preaching that there is no such thing as Hell and that everyone will eventually be saved. In a short period of time, 90 percent of the church’s 5,000 members stopped attending, the bank foreclosed on their 30-acre site in an upscale neighborhood, and their final church service in that building was held on New Year’s Eve. In an effort to be accommodating to his culture, this pastor essentially denied the classic Christian belief that salvation involves turning from sin and accepting God’s forgiveness through faith in Jesus (www.christianitytoday.com).

In short, this pastor forgot his purpose, and so will we if we take our eyes off the Lord and His unfailing Word. The apostle Paul did not equivocate because he knew exactly what his purpose was. Please turn to Romans 1:8-17 as we continue our study in the Book of Romans. Last week we pondered three different perspectives from Paul in the opening verses:

- Who you are determines what you do**
- Who Jesus is determines the gospel you give**
- What you believe determines how you behave**

We’re going to study eight different principles that together define Paul’s purpose.

1. Become totally thankful (Ro 1:8a) (note).

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you.

Paul developed the attitude of gratitude for the believers in this church, even though he had never even been to Rome. Notice that this is the first thing he does because thankfulness is the first true mark of Christian maturity. We see the intimate relationship Paul had with his Lord by the use of the personal pronoun “*my*” in reference to God. Because God owned Him, he was able to call God his own. It’s also interesting that he thanks God for “*all*” the believers. **Do you thank God for everyone around you?**

Paul begins with a compliment to these Christians. One pastor put it this way:

There’s a very familiar principle at work here: People tend to become what you believe them to be. If you say to a child, ‘You’re stupid,’ he’ll struggle forever in his classes. If you tell him that he’s God’s champion, he will tackle any task.

Paul affirms the Romans and tells them that he is so thankful for them. **Who can you give thanks for today?**

2. Give people something to talk about (Ro 1:8b). (note).

“...because your faith is being reported all over the world.”

Rome was the capital and the major city at that time. Because of how these Christians were living, their faith was the focus of conversations everywhere. Perhaps they went something like this:

Have you heard how strong their faith is, even though they are living in such a pagan environment?

The word “*reported*” (**kataggello**) means to announce or proclaim something openly and loudly and is in the present tense, meaning that it was happening continuously. This picture is painted by Paul again in Colossians 1:6 (**note**):

All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing...

What do people say about you when they talk behind your back? Do they comment on your critical spirit? Do they wonder why you whine so much? Do they attest to your anger? Do people give you the name gossip? Or, do they focus on your faith? I often wonder what our community thinks of our church. When I’m really brave I ask individuals what they think of PBC. I long for the day when the majority of those who talk about PBC would loudly proclaim,

That’s a church filled with faithful people so touched by God’s grace that they live out their faith in practical ways.

Norma McCorvey, who is better known as the “Roe” of the infamous **Roe v. Wade** Supreme Court ruling in 1973 that legalized abortion, has become a born again Christian and is now unashamedly pro life. Her faith is being reported all over the world.

It’s incredible how easy it is today for the gospel message to spread around the world through our multimedia ministry. About a week ago I received an email from a pastor in Brazil asking for permission to translate one of our sermon series. I immediately said “sure” and also sent him our PowerPoint templates. I’m glad he didn’t ask me to translate these sermons.

Our faith is being reported all over the world.

I received an email from Geoff Trembley this week that shows how we can creatively utilize our website for evangelism. Geoff, a new member at PBC, travels a lot and shares what happened on his most recent trip:

I have a new phone from work that lets me check email and surf the web on the road, since I am rarely (ever) at my desk. I was reading your blog on the plane on the ground and the person sitting next to me was interested in what I was doing, so I was able to show them the PBC website while I “demonstrated” the phone. Long story short, I did have a chance to share the Gospel with them in a very non-confrontational way.”

Our faith is being reported all over the world!

We received a note this week thanking our AWANA ministry for sending money to Puebla, Mexico. The quarters that are collected each week added up to around \$400! This money will be used to purchase books and uniforms for those who can’t afford them. Imagine what little Mexican children are saying about Pontiac Bible Church:

The faith of our PBC AWANA kids is being reported all over the world.

Next weekend Beth Hanna, our missionary to San Juan Del Rio, Mexico, will be with us (please read the information printed on the insert in your bulletin). We’re going to play a brief video right now that summarizes one of the projects she is working on.

Her faith is being reported all over the world.

Beth Hanna serves Jesus with everything she has. That leads to the third principle...

3. Serve Christ wholeheartedly (Ro 1:9). (note).

God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son...

The word “**serve**” (**latreuo**) that Paul uses here is always used of religious service and is sometimes translated as worship. Whatever Paul was doing, he was worshipping the Lord. The greatest worship we can offer to God is to serve Him unreservedly, without holding back anything. For Paul, his worship was an act of service and his service was an act of worship.

One thing you notice pretty quickly by reading Paul’s letters is that he was totally sold out to the Savior. He served God with his whole heart. In the recent Barna Update (3/6/06), researchers reveal that most Americans consider themselves to be not merely “religious,” but “deeply spiritual.” Unfortunately, while most of us think we’re highly spiritual, our behaviors often betray what we say we believe. For instance, among the 59% who refer to themselves as “a full-time servant of God,” a mere one-quarter placed faith as their highest priority.

Barna points out that there is a significant disconnect between how people perceive their commitment and their reticence to make faith their top priority:

Spirituality is in vogue in our society today. It is popular to claim to...have a spiritual commitment...The recent

Grammy awards were perhaps indicative of this breakdown between self-perception and reality. The members of the group that won the award for best song thanked God for the victory then immediately followed with profanities that had to be bleeped from the broadcast. It seems as if God is in, but living for God is not. Many Americans are living a dual life – one filled with good feelings about God and faith, corroborated by some simple religious practices, and another in which they are in control of their own destiny and operate apart from Him” (www.barna.org).

Paul was whole-hearted, not half-hearted. For those of us who have been believers for awhile, we have to guard ourselves so we don't end up like Solomon did as we read in 1Kings 11:4 (**note**):

As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God...

If you were to read through the entire Bible, you could summarize what God wants in a couple of words. He wants your whole life. God doesn't want half of you, He doesn't want most of you...He wants *all* of you. Have you settled into a comfortable, casual Christianity? If you were to put a percentage on the depth of your devotion, what number would you give yourself? Are you 50% faithful? 75% committed? 95%? Bill Hybels has said that if I'm 99% sold-out to Christ, I'm still 1% short. What about you? Does God have all of you? I like how the *New Living Translation* renders Romans 6:13 (**note**):

Give yourselves completely to God since you have been given new life. And use your whole body as a tool to do what is right for the glory of God.

C. S. Lewis once said,

The only thing Christianity cannot be is moderately important.”

It's time to surrender wholly so we can serve wholeheartedly.

4. Persevere in your prayers (Ro 1:10). (**note**).

“...Is my witness how constantly I remember you. In my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you.”

He constantly remembers them, which means he doesn't take a break. The word means to “not take an intermission.” He was incessant in his intercession for them. Notice that one of his requests was for a way to be opened for him to visit them. Don't miss the key phrase that must punctuate every one of our prayers: “**by God's will.**” He wanted to go to Rome really bad but he wanted God's will even more. That's a good corrective for us. We should pray hard and long but never lose sight that what really matters is what God wants for us.

I really like what **Ray Pritchard** says in this regard:

Prayer also bridges the gap between people. You can be here...and they can be way over there, and through prayer you can bridge the gap that separates you. Prayer spans the miles that separate us. Prayer overcomes the misunderstanding that separates us. Prayer leaps across the bad memories that pull us apart. Prayer nullifies the estrangement that keeps us from speaking. There can be bitterness and anger between you, even years of alienation. But that doesn't matter when you pray because prayer bridges the gap between you and those you love. Your heart can touch their heart by the simple act of praying.” ([A Heart to Heart Ministry - Romans 1:8-15](#)).

Do you pray for people without giving up? Part of our purpose is to persevere in our praying. To not pray according to 1Samuel 12:23 is tantamount to sinning against people:

As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you.

5. Develop a mutual ministry (Ro 1:11-12). (**note**).

I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong- that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

The word “long” means to yearn for someone. When Paul thought of the Romans his heart literally ached. We know that he knew some of the people in Rome like Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:2, 18-19; Romans 16:3-**note**), but notice that what he was most pumped about was to help make them stronger and more encouraged. In fact, when Paul saw that they were strengthened in their faith, he was encouraged in his own. It reminds me of the story of William Carey when he was about to board a ship to India to begin missionary service there. Some of his friends asked if he really wanted to go through with his plans. Expressing his great desire for their support in prayer, he replied,

"I will go down into the pit itself, if you will hold the rope."

On Thursday night, PCS had a potluck and a talent show. The highlight of the night for me was when little five-year-old Lyda Robinson got up to sing the song, "Holy, Holy, Holy." As she stood on the stage in her pig tails, she froze as the music started. Then a really cool thing happened. The crowd started singing the song very softly, hoping she would join in. Her teacher eventually went up to her to give her some encouragement and then Lyda asked the crowd to sing it with her. We started again from the beginning, this time with Lyda leading us into a time of worship and praise. What a great picture of mutual ministry. We helped her out and then she ministered to us as together we praised God for His holiness.

Let's admit something today. We all need encouragement. I need it and you need it. And, as we minister in tandem, God is honored, people are served, and we end up being encouraged. **Don't you love hearing stories of God at work?** After hearing about how God is using our website, one member of the multimedia team emailed me this week and said:

"Thanks for the encouragement. I think it helps to keep our souls energized to hear stories like that ... at least it does mine."

God energizes us through encouragement. Who can you encourage today?

6. Allow your plans to be interrupted (Ro 1:13) (note).

"I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles."

Some people probably wondered why Paul had not yet come to Rome. He wants them to know that it's not because he hadn't prayed and hadn't planned to do so. God had not yet made a way. According to Acts 19:21, his plans were to go to Rome, but it didn't work out. He returns to this idea in Romans 15:23 (note): **"I have been longing for many years to see you..."** Again, his reason for wanting to go to Rome was to take part in God's harvest. His ministry was an unending quest to gather the fruit of changed lives.

Most commentators believe Paul was in Corinth when he wrote this letter to the Romans. It's interesting that Paul eventually does make it to Rome but not in the way he had planned for he ended up as a prisoner in a Roman jail. Paul recognized that this was God's plan for him and was able to say in Philippians 1:13 (note):

As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.

Friend, how do you handle interrupted plans? I don't score very high on this one. Let's remember the truth of Isaiah 55:8 (note):

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.

When God interrupts our plans it's so His purposes can prevail. We need to be OK with that. Are you?

7. Live out your obligation to Christ (Ro 1:14-15) (note).

I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome.

Paul felt he was morally obligated to get the message out to everyone. His one consuming passion was to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, to all people, irregardless of their cultural, educational, or religious background. We see this in 1 Corinthians 9:16-17:

...for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!"

Paul is eager to preach, which means that he is ready, willing, and able. His number one aim was to do God's work. Period. There was nothing more.

What is it that you are eager to do? What do you long for? What are you living for? The answers to these questions will tell you more than you may want to know. Only God's Word and people last forever so make sure you are investing your life in that which will last for eternity.

8. Don't be ashamed of the gospel (Ro 1:16-17) (note).

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'

These are some of the most life-transforming truths ever written. They not only serve as the theme and thesis for the rest of Romans but also concisely summarize the gospel message and our mandate to share it with the world.

The word “**ashamed**” can have two meanings in the Greek. One means to become “red-faced,” and the other refers to being disappointed. My eyes were opened this week to the shame Paul must have felt when he looked back on what his life was like before coming to Christ. Listen to these words from Dr. Jo Ann Nishimoto, a therapist at Minirth-Meier in Wheaton:

Paul had led a crusade to kill...he must have felt unworthy of grace...I think he must have struggled with intense self-loathing...he faced a dilemma: would he deeply embrace God's truth of forgiveness and redemption? Although the Bible doesn't give us the details, can't you just imagine the inner pain he felt the first time he passed the spot where he'd so gladly condoned Stephen's stoning? I would imagine that Paul cast his eyes to the ground and bit his lip in sorrow. He may have ducked into an alley to weep. After laying down that night, the image of Stephen's glowing face intruded on his attempts to sleep...Paul eventually resolved his guilt and shame by freeing himself to see himself as God saw him...forgiven...clean. It probably came to him the same way it comes to us. Slowly. In fits and starts...while we might have some fear of the way others may see us, the most important thing is to embrace the way God sees us...In the end we must give God, and not others, the right to define us.”

That's why Paul could say in Romans 10:11 (**note**):

“Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”

Once we come to Christ we have no reason to be ashamed and we will have no valid reason to ever be disappointed by God as Isaiah 49:23 (**note**) states:

Then you will know that I am the LORD; those who hope in me will not be disappointed.

In Romans 1:16-17, Paul lists four reasons why he is not ashamed.

We are not ashamed because the gospel is all-powerful.

The word powerful here is the root from which we get “dynamic,” “dynamo,” and “dynamite.” Notice that the gospel doesn't bring power or point to power; it actually *is* the power of God because it is powerful enough to accomplish God's purpose in saving us from our sins.

A few years ago a vacuum cleaner salesman knocked on the door of a farmhouse. No sooner had the lady opened the door, when the salesman ran in and started talking about the vacuum he was trying to sell. He made his way to the living room, talking all the time so she couldn't interrupt him. He told her that the vacuum would suck up everything in the house, that it was so powerful that you had to be careful with it. She tried to speak to no avail. Then he said he wanted to show her how powerful it was so he dumped a huge pile of dirt and ashes in the middle of the floor. She tried to stop him but before she could say anything, he said, “*Mam, if this vacuum doesn't suck this up in two minutes I'll eat it with a spoon.*” She finally got an opportunity to speak and said, “*Well, you better start eating because we ain't got no electricity.*”

Many of us are not plugged into God's power and are therefore not experiencing the explosive dynamite of the gospel message in our lives.

Listen to what Jesus said in Matthew 22:29:

You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.

When the gospel is grasped, God's power is unleashed with electricity and excitement. 1 Corinthians 1:18:

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

We are not ashamed because the gospel is for every person.

Whether someone was Greek in their heritage or a mixture of Irish and Polish like me, the gospel is for everyone. We shouldn't be intimidated by the smart and powerful, nor should we look down on those who are not cultured and refined. Every person should have the opportunity to experience the power of God's gospel. That's one of the reasons we support as many missionaries as we do and why we're looking for some more who are headed to the most unreached places in the world.

We are not ashamed because the gospel reveals God's righteousness.

Let's think for a moment about three theological words that represent doctrinal truth from the Book of Romans. I'll quickly introduce them because we'll tackle them in greater depth later in our series.

ü **Justification.** You and are delivered from the *penalty* of sin. We are no longer held guilty but are acquitted of our crimes against a holy God. Those who are profoundly unrighteous are pronounced righteous; we are justified because of what Christ has done on the cross.

Romans 8:1 (**note**): *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."*

Our guilt and rebellion is taken away and we're given grace and righteousness.

ü **Sanctification.** This word means that we are delivered from the *power* of sin. While sin is not totally eradicated from our lives, we no longer have to live in bondage to it. As the Holy Spirit works in our lives in tandem with His Word as we read and study, we are becoming more and more like Jesus.

Romans 6:1-2 (**note**): *What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"*

ü **Glorification.** Not only are believers set free from the penalty and power of sin, we will eventually be delivered from the *presence* of sin when we leave this earth and spend eternity with Christ. God will finish the work He began when He justified us.

Romans 8:18 (**note**): *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*

We are not ashamed because the Gospel is received by faith alone.

The word "believe" literally means to "lean upon." This was the cry of the Reformation: ***Sola Fide***, by faith alone.

Martin Luther took his stand on this very verse when he declared:

Unless therefore I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture, or by the clearest reasoning...I cannot and I will not retract, for it unsafe for a Christian to speak against his conscience."

Then looking around at those who held his life in their hands, Luther said:

"Here I stand. I can do no other. May God help me. Amen."

Later in life, Luther referred to Romans 1:17 as the

"chief article from which all our other doctrines have flowed...if the article of justification is lost, all Christian doctrine is lost at the same time" (From D'Aubigne, "The Life and Times of Martin Luther," 423-434).

Faith must involve the mind, the heart, and most importantly, the will. We must move from knowledge about the gospel, to feelings about the gospel to a commitment to the gospel. Paul was able to refer to God as "my God" in verse 8. Is He your God? Have you received His righteousness by faith? Remember this:

***Salvation is not something we achieve but
something we receive when we believe!***

This past week I finished reading *Night* by Ellie Wiesel, Nobel Peace Prize winner, and author of over 30 books dealing with Judaism and the Holocaust. I was stunned and deeply saddened by what I read. Of all the things he says in his book, I was most moved by this statement: *"To remain silent and indifferent is the greatest sin of all."* We must never forget what happened during the Holocaust and we must also remember that there's an even worse Holocaust coming called Hell for those who do not put their faith and trust in Jesus. We can't ignore this doctrine nor can we stop speaking about our Savior. We cannot remain silent any longer and our indifference must be replaced with repentance and a recommitment to share the good news of the gospel with everyone we know.

Why are we ashamed at times? What are we so afraid of? Rejection? Isolation? Luke 9:26:

"If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels."

It's no small thing to shrink back from the Savior. It's time for us to step it up as Paul did in 2Timothy 1:12 (**note**):

"That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day."

Let's determine to put into practice what we know to be true. Are you willing to make the following commitment?

I will prayerfully select someone to befriend, pray for, look for ways to serve, and trust God for natural opportunities to share the "power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes."

Prayer. Begin praying every day for this person. Pray for their health, safety, relationships, and for their spiritual interest to grow. Pray for God-ordained appointments to build a friendship.

Care. Look for ways to respond to practical needs. Listen for what he or she longs for and try to meet that need. Bake a meal. Mow a lawn. Send a card. Do whatever God prompts you to do.

Share. When God gives the opportunity, boldly proclaim who Jesus is and what He's done in your life. Here's an idea: *Just start talking and let God give you the words to say.* Sometimes we don't say anything because we don't know what to say. Just say something and God will do the rest. One day when the disciples were worried about what they would say if they were arrested for their faith, Jesus made this statement that has direct application to us when we are nervous about speaking up for Christ in Mark 13:11:

Do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit."

I talked to someone on Friday who told me that she invited three people to church this week. She then laughed and said, "If everyone came that I've invited, we'd need five services!" Friends, let's do the same thing. Wouldn't it be great if we had to add another three services? Make a bridge to spiritual matters during your conversations and utilize the various outreach events here at PBC – the Easter Hunt Adventure for kids on April 8th, the "Lamb of God" musical on Palm Sunday, the "Living Lord's Supper" on Good Friday, and our three Easter morning services as we focus on "CSI Jerusalem: The Empty Tomb."

But before we'll put any of this into practice, we must first settle our purpose:

- Become totally thankful**
- Give people something to talk about**
- Serve Christ wholeheartedly**
- Persevere in your prayers**
- Develop a mutual ministry**
- Allow your plans to be interrupted**
- Live out your obligation to Christ**
- Don't be ashamed of the gospel**

One of my favorite preachers, who ministered more than a century ago, is **Charles Haddon Spurgeon**. He did not equivocate on the doctrine of Hell or lose his passion for preaching Christ. I close with his words:

The Holy Spirit will move them by first moving you. If you can rest without their being saved, they will rest too. But if you are filled with an agony for them, if you cannot bear that they should be lost, you will soon find that they are uneasy too. I hope you will get into such a state that you will dream about your child or your hearer perishing for lack of Christ, and start up at once and begin to cry, 'God, give me converts or I die.' Then you will have converts" ([Acts 11:21 Conversions Desired](#)).

Romans 2:1-4 God is More Kind Than We Think - 6/4/06

Harry Ironside tells the story about Bishop Potter who was sailing for Europe on an ocean liner many years ago. When he boarded he found out that he had to share his cabin with another man and after meeting his roommate he went up to the purser's desk and asked if he could leave his gold watch and other valuables in the ship's safe. He explained that he ordinarily wouldn't do this but after meeting the man who was to occupy his room, he could just tell from his appearance that he was not a very trustworthy person. The purser accepted the responsibility for the valuables and remarked,

"It's all right, Bishop, I'll be very glad to take care of them for you. Your bunkmate has already been here and left his valuables for the same reason!"

It's so easy to condemn in others the very same thing we excuse in ourselves. I want to state at the very beginning that I am a hypocrite...and so are you. I have many examples to choose from but I'll pick just one. When we were in Biloxi two months ago all the men slept in the church sanctuary. The first night we were there I tried to figure out who the snorers were so I could position myself as far away from them as possible. Sure enough, almost as soon as the lights went off, the Jon Dewald chainsaw started running and didn't turn off until morning. I hassled him the whole next day for keeping us all awake. Before we went to sleep the next night I enlisted one of the guys and we picked up Jon's cot and took it outside. I gave Jon grief all week.

When I arrived home I told Beth about Jon's incessant snoring and she just looked at me and started laughing. I asked her why she was looking at me like that and she said, *"Because you snore a lot, too!"* I couldn't believe it. Here I had jumped on Jon when I was probably keeping others up with my nocturnal noisiness. When I asked Jon for permission to share this story with you he started laughing as well. And then he told me something that just confirms my holy hypocrisy. He told me that when he woke up during the first night he heard snoring in surround sound and I was apparently leading the choir.

Why is it that we tend to be harder on others than we are on ourselves? Why are we inclined to exaggerate the faults of others while excusing our own foibles? In short, why do we look down on people who sin differently than we do? We all tend to divide sins into two categories: my sins and your sins, and of course, your sins are worse than mine.

This morning we're picking up Paul's letter to the Romans again as we camp in the first four verses of chapter 2. If you remember just one thing, remember this: *Romans chapter two is for those of us who liked Romans chapter one a little too much.* Before I explain, let's review what we learned in chapter one. Since Paul is building his case section by section, it's a bit difficult to just jump into chapter two without some context.

We learned three truths about obedience in Ro 1:1-7:

ü **Who you are determines what you do**

ü **Who Jesus is determines the gospel you give**

ü **What you believe determines how you behave**

In Ro 1:8-17, we discovered some principles to help us find our purpose and concluded with the challenge that we must never be ashamed of the gospel

because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew and then for the Greek.

Pastor Dick asked whether we have selective hearing from Ro 1:18-20 by establishing that God has revealed Himself both internally and externally. Our problem is that we suppress the truth and are therefore without excuse and open to God's wrath. Then, in the final verses of Romans 1, Pastor Jeff taught us that *when anyone or anything sits on the throne of our lives other than Jesus, it is idolatry.* We also learned that God gives people over who won't worship Him. After listing some specific sins that many of us get mad about, Paul concludes the chapter with a long list of sins that hit a bit closer to home.

Now with that as a brief summary, let's go back to the closing verses of chapter one and notice the use of **"they"** and **"them"** in Ro 1:28-32 (**note**) :

Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

I can just imagine Paul's readers saying

Give it to them because their sins are dramatic and deviant. Those guys are keeping us up all night with their bad behavior."

They're ready to take their cots outside so the good guys can get some sleep. We too are often horrified by the unholy behavior that takes place in our culture, but ultimately we are in the same fundamental predicament. Notice how the pronouns change in Ro

2:1-4 (**note**). :

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?

In Ro 1:20 (**note**), Paul says that men are without excuse. In Ro 2:1, he personalizes this by saying,

You have no excuse.

The "they" becomes "us." We could say it this way:

In chapter one Paul is telling the 'immoral' pagans that judgment awaits; in chapter two, he includes the 'moral' pagans in on the bad news.

Chapter one references the outwardly immoral while chapter two describes the inwardly sinful. Or we could say it like this:

Everything that is recorded in Romans one took place last night in Livingston County and all that is in Romans two is taking place among people listening to my voice right now, including yours truly.

Bob Deffinbaugh uses this illustration:

When I was growing up our family had a dog that did not attack from the front. His practice was to come up from behind, very quietly, without giving any notice. The first indication of his presence was the painful sensation of his teeth, sinking into your backside...in the first two chapters of Romans...Paul prepares to attack, but without letting his readers know what's coming. Suddenly, in the first verses of chapter two, the "teeth" of Paul's indictment sink into the reader, catching him completely unprepared" ([The Coming Wrath of God: Self-Righteousness is Unrighteousness - Romans 2:1-29](#)).

I see three ways that these verses take a bite out of us:

1. Our judging is inexcusable (Ro 2:1) (note).

Romans 2:1 tells us that we have no excuse for our attitude and actions because "good" people are not that much different from "bad" people:

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.

If you've never judged anyone else, you're welcome to leave right now because I'd like to talk to those of us who have passed judgment on others. The word "judge" is a legal term that means to find a person guilty; it's the idea of setting oneself over another. I like how Eugene Peterson paraphrases this verse:

Those people are on a dark spiral downward. But if you think that leaves you on the high ground where you can point your finger at others, think again. Every time you criticize someone, you condemn yourself. It takes one to know one.

Last week Pastor Dick reminded us that we're supposed to look for fruit in people's lives but we're to do so through the lens of grace. Jesus cautions us however to stop criticizing and condemning and finding fault in Matthew 7:1 (**note**): "**Do not judge, or you too will be judged.**" In other words, we are to stop playing God or we will be judged by the same standards. Paul picks up on this thought taught in Matthew 7:2 (**note**):

Jesus then proceeds to point out that we must first remove the log in our own eyes before we can help someone get the speck out of their own. It's easier to work on the faults of others than our own, isn't it? Many of us are like the prodigal's older brother, who never left home but who harbored hatred and rebellion in his heart.

Let's just admit that we enjoy judging others and we tend to judge them most severely for the same things we're guilty of. That reminds me of the elderly couple who had stopped at a restaurant while they were on a road trip. After finishing their meal, they jumped back in the car. After about twenty minutes the wife told her husband that she had unknowingly left her glasses back at the restaurant. The husband blew his top because there was no place to turn around. When they finally headed back, he grouched and complained the whole way, scolding his wife for being so forgetful. He reminded her that this was ruining their day and they were now going to be late for their next stop. When they finally arrived at the restaurant, the wife opened the door quickly and hurried

across the parking lot. The husband rolled down his window and yelled, "While you're in there, you might as well get my hat and credit card."

Paul is saying that if we think we can judge everybody else, then we will be judged by the same standard we set up.

Ray Stedman points out that most of us are prone to accuse others while excusing ourselves. He mentions three ways that we do this.

We are blind toward many of our own faults.

I didn't know I snored but everyone else did. We all have blind spots and according to Jeremiah 17:9 [note](#)) even our hearts can be deceived:

"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"

We tend to forget the wrong that we have done. We might recognize our sin at the time we commit it but then we just assume that God and others will just forget about it. Hebrews 4:13 [note](#)):

"Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account."

We often rename our sins. Other people lie and cheat; we simply stretch the truth. Others blow up in anger; we just blow off steam. Others have prejudices; we just have convictions. We need to remember the biting words found in Matthew 5:21-22 [note](#)) whenever we think our sins don't smell as bad as other people's:

You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment."

When it comes to judging, we have no excuse. We're all busted. The second bite ambushes us just as much as the first one...

2. Our judgment is inescapable (Ro 2:2-3)[note](#)).

Ro 2:2-3 state that our judgment is inescapable:

Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment?"

None of us has the knowledge, impartiality or objectivity to judge anyone. Jesus hammered this truth home in John 7:24:

Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment.

God is able to see what's in the heart according to 1Samuel 16:7 [note](#)):

The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.

God judges justly on the basis of what really exists, not what merely appears to be. He sees all the facts, the multiple motives, each action and every attitude. It was **F. B. Meyer** who said that when we see a brother or sister in sin, there are two things we do not know: First, we do not know how hard he or she tried not to sin. And second, we do not know the power of the forces that assailed him or her. We also do not know what we would have done in the same circumstances.

Why are we so critical and caustic with others? Think of it this way. Every time we are judgmental toward another person, we are in essence displaying our distrust or lack of faith in God to take care of His kingdom. Remember that He is God and we are not. And when He passes judgment, we have no basis to object or ask for a retrial. Psalm 96:10 [note](#)):

Say among the nations, 'The LORD reigns.' The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity" and Ps 96:13: "...He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth."

Here's a news flash: ***God doesn't need any help in judging others.***

Now, some of you may wonder why then the church speaks out against sin or confronts people who go astray. One of the two charges I hear leveled against the church is that it's filled with judgmental people. The other claim is that it's heaping with hypocrites. While it's true that sometimes people are hypocritical and judgmental, this church *is* a place of grace. At the same time, one of our guiding values is to make sure grace is not taken advantage of, and that we provide accountability for our members' attitudes and actions. When we do confront, our desire according to Ephesians 4:15 [note](#)) is as we speak

the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

When we talk to you about something, when we warn you about the path you're on, or share wisdom from Scripture, it's because of love, not judgment. After all, Paul made a strong moral judgment in chapter one that certain attitudes and actions are wrong. Love calls us to speak up. To sit back and say nothing is not loving either. Listen to the words of James 5:19-20 ([note](#)):

My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this:
Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

We must speak to people when we see them sliding down a wrong path but we must also be careful to not be Judgmental or prideful. Take these words from Galatians 6:1 ([note](#)) to heart:

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.

Go with gentleness, keeping restoration as your goal, and don't be proud. Here's a principle to keep in mind:

It should always be difficult to confront someone when they're straying. If you enjoy doing it, you're probably being judgmental.

Be careful about passing judgment on others. Look back to Ro 2:3 ([note](#)) where we read:

So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment?"

Commentator Donald Barnhouse points out that the intensity of this verse is lost in the English and provides this translation:

You dummy, do you really figure that you have doped out an angle that will let you go up against God and get away with it? You don't have a ghost of a chance. There's no escape. Do you understand that? No escape, that means you, the respectable person sitting in judgment on others and remaining unrepentant yourself to the evil in your heart. You dummy.

The first two bites sneak up on us: *Our judging is inexcusable* and *our judgment is inescapable*. The third attack is much more pleasant, provided we respond in repentance...

3. Our journey is irresistible (Ro 2:4) ([note](#)).

God's goal is for our good. He rebukes us so that we will respond with repentance and His kindness should lead us to becoming contrite. Look at Ro 2:4:

Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?

The word "**contempt**" is very strong. The King James uses "*despiset*." It means "to grossly underestimate the significance of something" or to "think down upon and scorn." Some of us struggle to think of God as kind while others of us consider His kindness as a justification for living any way we want to. Matthew Henry once said: "*There is in every willful sin a contempt of the goodness of God.*" It's easy to enjoy the goodness of God without living for God. This is dangerous. God's goodness toward you is not a stamp of approval for how you are living. Paul addresses this in Romans 6:1-2 ([note](#)):

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?

This is illustrated in the Book of Hosea where we read of God's love for His wayward people. Listen to Hosea 11:1, 4 ([note](#)):

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son...I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them.

What a graphic description of His goodness and kindness! Listen to how His people responded in Hos 11: 2 and Hos 11:7 ([note](#)):

But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me...My people are determined to turn from me."

Don't you love that God is not stingy with His goodness toward us? The word "**riches**" implies wealth and abundance as used in Ephesians 2:7 ([note](#)):

In order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

Let's look a bit more closely at the three ways God opens up His treasure chest:

The riches of His kindness.

Psalm 145:17: *"The LORD is righteous in all his ways and loving toward all he has made."*

Psalm 33:5 says: *"The earth is full of his unfailing love."*

God is generous with His grace.

The riches of His tolerance. This word means to "hold back" and was used of a truce between two warring parties.

Psalm 130:3: *"If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?"*

Just because He has shown you tolerance does not mean you are at peace with Him or that He is pleased with you.

The riches of His patience. We are in a grace period right now. God's patience has a purpose. As Jonah stated in Jonah 4:2, God is

"a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity."

Aren't you glad that God is good, that he holds back what we deserve and that He is patient?

John MacArthur says that

the goodness of God is nowhere more clearly seen than that when man commits a sin he doesn't fall over dead on the spot. God had every reason at the Fall to wipe out the human race...every reason. And He has the same reason every single time you and I commit one sin. And it is only His goodness and His forbearance and His longsuffering that lets us take another breath" ([Principles of God's Judgment, Part 2](#)).

Ray Stedman adds,

Why didn't He judge me yesterday when I said that sharp, caustic word that plunged like an arrow into a loved one's heart? Why didn't he shrivel my hand when I took a pencil and cheated on my income tax? Why didn't he strike me dumb when I was gossiping on the phone this morning, sharing a tidbit that made someone look bad in someone else's eyes?" ([Sinful Morality - Romans 2:1-11](#))

Are you grateful for God's goodness or do you take it for granted?

The problem is that some of us presume upon His kindness and end up living the way we want to. Paul reminds us that God's kindness is meant to lead us toward repentance. In other words, His mercy should melt us because it is overwhelming and undeserved. The word **"lead"** means *"to drive"* or *"to induce"* us to repent. If He is leading you to turn back to Him He will never turn you away once you turn to Him. God takes no pleasure in pronouncing judgment because His purpose is to produce repentance. We see this in Ezekiel 18:23, 32 ([note](#)):

Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?...

For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!

To repent means to forsake and turn from sin and turn toward God. Have you ever wondered why God doesn't just wipe out the world right now? Let me bring it closer to home. Have you ever asked why God doesn't vaporize you when you sin? The answer is found in 2Peter 3:9 ([note](#)), 2Pe 3:15 ([note](#)):

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance...

Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation..."

I read that a year or two before Mr. Rogers died; someone in Philadelphia stole his car. The news media broadcast the story and before long the thief who took the car realized that it belonged to Mr. Rogers. Because Mr. Rogers was such a kind man the criminal did something he had never done before – he returned the car. It's hard to be cantankerous when you're around kindness, isn't it? Because God is kind to us, we should respond in repentance.

Our judgmental attitudes are ultimately destructive while God's judgment is meant to be constructive. The purpose behind God's condemnation and His kindness is redemptive: *He is waiting for us to repent...before it's too late*

- Our Judging is Inexcusable**
- Our Judgment is Inescapable**
- Our Journey is Irresistible**

Action Steps

1. Stop judging.

How many times a day do you talk about other people and look down your nose at them? Do you disdain people who sin differently than you do? Stop it. Instead of judging, realize that when you judge, you come under judgment. Remember that others are on a journey, just like you are.

2. Change your pronouns.

Stop using "them" and "they;" and "he" or "she." If we want to grow in this area, we must personalize the problem because it really involves three people: me, myself and I. Too many of us talk about ourselves only when we're bragging. Here's an idea. Brag on others instead of blasting them; when you talk about yourself, mention something you've done wrong. It will keep you humble. Plus, you'll be much easier to be around.

3. Give God is job back.

Ask the Lord to help you be perfectly content to allow Him to judge people instead of trying to do his job for Him.

4. Be positive.

When you catch yourself talking negatively about someone else, immediately say something positive. And, when you hear someone else judging or gossiping, insert a constructive comment into the conversation.

5. Get to know God. Start viewing God as kind, tolerant and patient and strive to be so yourself. In addition, see Him as holy, faithful, just, sovereign, and all-powerful.

6. Respond with repentance. Allow God's kindness to lead you to repentance. What do you need to turn from right now? Don't be like Felix who said to Paul in Acts 24:25: ***"When I find it convenient, I will send for you."*** It's dangerous to wait and it's foolish to presume upon God's patience because it will not last forever. We see this in Acts 17:30 (**note**):

In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.

I love how the great preacher **Charles Spurgeon** ([from sermon "Earnest Expostulation"](#)) communicated the urgency of repentance:

It seems to me that every morning when a man wakes up still impenitent, and finds himself out of hell, the sunlight seems to say, 'I shine on thee yet another day, as that in this day thou mayest repent.' When your bed receives you at night I think it seems to say, 'I will give you another night's rest, that you may live to turn from your sins and trust in Jesus...do not life and death, and heaven and hell, call upon you to do so? Thus you have in God's goodness space for repentance...

Communion:

Where Kindness and Condemnation Meet

The riches of God's kindness and the complexities of God's judgment are difficult to fully comprehend. This passage teaches that God is kind *and* He condemns; He is love *and* He has laws; He is just *and* He is the justifier of the unjust.

John MacArthur shares the following story about a time when tribes roamed Russia. One particular tribe stood out because of their great leader's wisdom and fair laws. Among his expectations were that parents must be loved and honored. He also declared that murder was punishable by death and stealing was never to be tolerated. The tribe was prospering greatly when suddenly a disturbing thing began to happen. It was reported to the great leader that someone was stealing and he sent out the proclamation that if the thief was caught he would receive ten lashes from the tribal whip master. The stealing continued despite the warnings, so he raised it to 20 lashes. It went on so he raised it to 30 lashes. And finally he raised it to 40 lashes.

At last the thief was caught. To the horror of everyone it turned out to be the chief's own mother. The tribe was in shock. What was

the leader going to do? His law was that parents were to be loved and honored. But thieves were to be whipped. Great arguments arose as the Day of Judgment approached. Was he going to satisfy his love and save his mother or was he going to satisfy his law and have her whipped to death? Soon tribal members were divided and even made wagers on what he would do. And finally the judgment day came. The tribe was gathered around the great compound in the center of which a large post was driven into the ground. The leader's great throne sat in the place of prominence and with great pomp and ceremony the leader entered, and took his place on the throne. The silence was deafening.

Soon his frail little mother was brought in by two towering warriors. They tied her to the post. The crowd continued to debate: *Will he satisfy his love at the expense of law? Or, would he satisfy his law at the expense of his love?* The tribal whip master entered, a powerful man with bulging muscles, a great leather whip in his hand. Everyone gasped. Was the leader really going to let her die? The leader sat staring without moving. Every eye was darting from him to the whip master and back again. The whip master took his stance; his great arm cracked the whip as he prepared to bring the first lash upon her. In every heart was the question: *Would he allow his love to be violated or his law?*

Just as the whip master started to bring his powerful arm forward with the first cutting stroke on that frail little back, the leader held up his hand to halt the punishment. A great sigh went up from the tribe. His love was going to be satisfied. But what about his law? They watched him rise from his throne and he strode toward his mother. As he walked he removed his own shirt. He threw it aside and proceeded to wrap his great arms around his little mother, exposing his huge muscular back to the whip master. Breaking the heavy silence, he commanded, *"Proceed with the punishment."* Thus both his law and his love were satisfied.

The Bible says that the wages of sin is death. And the Bible says Jesus died for our sins. He satisfied His love by dying in our place. He satisfied His law by taking the punishment for our sin. As we come to communion, let's come with a brokenness of heart over our propensity to judge others and let's come with a sense of our sin that has caused a dreadful breach between us and God. During Passover the Jews made a diligent search for leaven, even lighting candles to search every corner of their homes. They then cast it out of their houses, even cursing themselves if they should willingly keep any of it around. Fellow sinner, take this time to do a search for sin in your life and when you find it, confess it, forsake it, and turn from it.

And let's be thankful that in the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, He made a way for us to be reconciled through the substitutionary sacrifice of His beloved Son, for He is more kind than we think. What a gift for both snorers and sinners alike!

Romans 2:5-11 We're More Stubborn Than We Think - 6/11/06

This story could only come out of Michigan...perhaps you saw it in the Pantagraph. In celebration of the date 6-6-06, this past Tuesday, a town called Hell, Michigan put on a party and invited the whole country to come. Radio stations as far away as San Diego and Seattle raffled off trips to Hell in honor of 6-6-6. The opening line in the story went like this:

They're planning a hot time in Hell today.

The mayor of the town exclaimed,

Everyone who comes will get a letter of authenticity saying you've celebrated June 6, 2006 in Hell.

The town's official website (www.hell2u.com) lists their many festivities and concludes with these words:

We're just taking advantage of an excuse to have fun! Come on out to Hell for a good time.

Friends, this is really not very funny. Those who live in Hell, Michigan may have had a good time on Tuesday, but those who are living forever in Hell are in eternal torment and unending misery. Many like to joke about the place of judgment because they can't stand to think about the reality of it. Friends, it is *not* a party place. Interestingly, one study I read reports that only about a third of Scottish clergy believe in the existence of Hell. According to a recent Harris poll, 76% of Americans expect to go to Heaven while only 2% believe they will go to Hell. A Gallup poll found that 71% believe in Hell, they just don't want to hear about it.

Even from pulpits across our country, you will seldom hear Hell preached because it is considered too negative. One article I read this week pointed out that Hell is being frozen out as clergy find themselves

increasingly hesitant to sermonize on Christianity's outpost for lost souls."

Kenneth Kantzer, former editor of *Christianity Today*, once said that he had not heard a sermon on Hell in 30 years. The thinking is that people won't come back to church if they hear a sermon about Hell. I anticipate that some of you won't like this message today for that reason. Part of me wants to tell you that we don't make a regular practice of preaching about Hell, which is true. On the other hand, if we're faithful to Scripture, we need to do more of it. Please know that my motive in doing so today is love and a desire

to communicate the full counsel of God. Did you know that Jesus actually spoke more about Hell than He did about Heaven?

After hearing about the festivities in Hell, Michigan I went back and read what is arguably the most famous sermon ever preached called "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" by Jonathon Edwards in 1741. I'd like to read some excerpts from this sermon which caused people to back down in repentance and break down in tears. Edwards was not known to be flamboyant but instead was very solemn, never once looking up from his notes. What moved people were the words and the fact that Edwards wept through the whole sermon as he warned them about God's coming wrath. I will interject other sections of his sermon into the message this morning, hoping and praying for similar results in your hearts, and in mine.

Using as his text Deuteronomy 32:35: "***Their foot shall slide in due time,***" Edwards uttered these words (www.ccel.org):

There is nothing that keeps wicked men at any one moment out of hell, but the mere pleasure of God... The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked: his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times more abominable in his eyes, than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours. You have offended him infinitely more than ever a stubborn rebel did his prince; and yet it is nothing but his hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment. ([Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God - Jonathan Edwards](#))

Our Church will not shrink back from the teaching of Scripture for we are convinced that we must first understand the horrible news about Hell before we will embrace the good news of the Gospel. Last week we learned from Romans 2:4 that God's kindness should lead us to repentance. Today we'll learn that God's coming condemnation should motivate us to turn to Him before it's too late. The Bible is very clear about absolutes. Jesus is the only way, the truth and the life. That means that there is no other way. You are either in the kingdom of God's beloved Son or you are still in the kingdom of darkness. You are saved or you are lost. You are forgiven or you are still in your sins. You will go to Heaven when you die or you will go to Hell.

Our Judgment is Personal

Please turn in your Bibles to Romans 2:5-11. I'd like us to begin by looking at Ro 2:6 (**note**):

God will give to each person according to what he has done.

God looks not only at what we say but at what we do. Some have wondered if Paul is contradicting what he teaches in the rest of Romans that justification comes only by faith and not by works. The simple answer is no.

Ro 3:28 (**note**): For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

Salvation is only by faith alone in Christ's work alone while judgment is based upon the deeds people have done. Our works, however, reveal what is in our heart for what is on the inside eventually comes out. One pastor put it this way:

That's why God judges by works. Not to establish the way of salvation but the basis of judgment. You are saved by faith and judged by works...your works ultimately reveal what is in your heart – either faith leading to life or unbelief leading to judgment.

This underscores what Pastor Dick said a couple weeks ago. If our faith is real it will produce fruit. Saving faith is always demonstrated by good works because our deeds declare what's hidden in our heart. Notice that "each person" will come under the searching judgment of God and that God's criterion is what we have done. Judgment is an individual matter and very personal. No one will escape and God will be extremely thorough. This idea of judgment according to deeds is taught throughout Scripture:

Ecclesiastes 12:14 (**note**): "For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil."

Matthew 16:27 (**note**) (**note**): "For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done."

John 5:28-29 (**note**): "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned."

2 Corinthians 5:10 (**note**): "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad."

In Matthew 7:13-14 (**note**), Jesus divides the entire human race into two categories. Those on the broad road and those on the narrow road:

Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

Paul picks up on this idea by showing us that there are many on the road to wrath and there a few on the path to peace.

God Divides the World into Two Groups

The argument in this passage follows a literary form called a chiasmus, meaning that there are two interwoven ideas interspersed throughout the section. Specifically, it's a reversal in the order of words in two otherwise parallel phrases. Paul doesn't introduce one idea and then when he's done, he moves to the next one. Instead, he bounces back and forth between the two. Let's take his second argument first.

1. The Savior-centered path of perseverance leads to peace (Ro 2:7, 10).

To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life...but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile."

To persist has the idea of "patient continuance." By persevering over a lifetime, we become one kind of person or another. This saying has a lot of merit:

Sow a thought and you reap an action;

Sow an act and you reap a habit;

Sow a habit and you reap a character;

Sow a character and you reap a destiny.

Those who have put their faith in Christ will exhibit the fruit of doing good deeds. When we are centered on the Savior we will seek His glory and His honor and will then live forever. Believers long to hear these words from the lips of our Lord:

Well done, good and faithful servant...come and share your Master's happiness" (Matthew 25:21).

In the meantime we are granted glory, we will be honored and we are given peace. You can't beat that, can you?

2. The self-centered road of rejection leads to wrath (Ro 2:5-note) (Ro 2:8-9-note).

Friends, we are either centered on the Savior or we are centered on self. Let's pick up Ro 2:5, 8-9:

But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed...But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

Let's look at verse five phrase by phrase.

- "Stubbornness."** This word means "hard" and we get the word sclerosis from it, as in hardening of the arteries, arteriosclerosis or even sclerosis of the liver. In the Book of Hebrews we're told three times to **"harden not your hearts."**

John MacArthur states that hardening of the arteries may *"take you to the grave but hardening of the heart will take you to Hell."*

Most of us are too stubborn to stop sinning because frankly we enjoy it too much.

- "Unrepentant heart."** An unrepentant heart that refuses to be melted by God's mercy will be jolted by God's judgment. Ezekiel 36:26 speaks of those who had a "heart of stone." Jesus was indignant with those with hard hearts in Mark 3:5:

He looked around at them in anger... deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts."

- “Storing up wrath.”** This has the idea of accumulating or collecting. Those who don’t know Jesus are accumulating their own condemnation. The full passage from which Jonathon Edwards quotes one phrase is Deuteronomy 32:34-35:

Have I not kept this in reserve and sealed it in my vaults? It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them.”

This concept is clarified in 1Thessalonians 2:16:

In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last.”

It’s as if every sin is brought to light and then added to the heap. Did you catch what happened after the 17 terror suspects were arrested last weekend in Canada? The lawyer who is representing one of the alleged terrorists revealed that his client was also planning to behead the Prime Minister of Canada. I think he may need a new lawyer. This charge will be added to his other charges as they accumulate against him. In a similar way, God is adding more and more charges against us every day.

James Montgomery Boice pictures a greedy individual who has been storing up wealth, which contrary to his expectations, is destined to destroy him. This man collected gold coins for years and stored them up in his attic above his bed. But one night as he was sleeping the weight of the gold coins broke through the ceiling in his bedroom and killed him. This is the way it is for those who pile sin upon sin and show contempt for God’s kindness. It will eventually all come crashing down.

Psalm 90:11 ([note](#)): *Who knows the power of your anger? For your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you.*

- “Day of God’s wrath.”** If you don’t take kindly to God’s kindness now you will receive His fury in the future. We’re introduced to God’s wrath in Romans 1:18 ([note](#)) where we learn that wrath is already being revealed and in Psalm 7:11 ([note](#)) where we read:

God is a righteous judge, a God who expresses his wrath every day.

We see this in the debilitating downward drag of sin on our lives. As Bill Hybels often says, **our tendency is to drift south spiritually**. But God’s wrath is more than just that. It will be poured out sometime in the future as Isaiah 13:9 ([note](#)) says:

See, the day of the LORD is coming--a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger...”

Revelation 20:11-12 ([note](#)) teaches that there is a set day in which God’s wrath will be unleashed, a time in which His patience and tolerance will run out:

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.”

Ro 2:8-9 teach that the self-seeking person ultimately rejects truth and follows evil. The one who lives only for himself or herself will come face-to-face with God’s wrath and anger and will end up in terrible trouble and deep distress. I fear that too much of modern-day Christianity feeds the cult of self. When our focus is on being happy, healthy and wealthy we lose sight of God’s demands for holiness. Remember that God is more concerned about forming our character than He is with us having fun and being comfortable.

C. S. Lewis captures it well:

Give up yourself, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to the death of your ambitions and your favorite wishes every day...keep back nothing. Nothing that you have not given away will ever be really yours. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look out for yourself and you will find, in the long run, only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin and decay. But look for Christ, and you will find Him, and with Him, everything else thrown in.

Let’s go back and hear from **Jonathan Edwards** again...

The wrath of God is like great waters that are dammed for the present; they increase more and more, and rise higher and higher, till an outlet is given; and the longer the stream is stopped, the more rapid and mighty is its course, when once it is let loose. It is true, that judgment against your evil works has not been executed hitherto; the floods of God’s vengeance have been withheld; but your guilt in the mean time is constantly

increasing, and you are every day treasuring up more wrath; the waters are constantly rising, and waxing more and more mighty; and there is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, that holds the waters back, that are unwilling to be stopped, and press hard to go forward. If God should only withdraw his hand from the flood-gate, it would immediately fly open, and the fiery floods of the fierceness and wrath of God, would rush forth with inconceivable fury, and would come upon you with omnipotent power; and if your strength were ten thousand times greater than it is, yea, ten thousand times greater than the strength of the stoutest, sturdiest devil in hell, it would be nothing to withstand or endure it. ([Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God - Jonathan Edwards](#))

Ro 2:11 states that **“God does not show favoritism.”** In the Greek this is a compound word made up of the word for “face” and the verb “to take.” It means to take at face value. God does not play favorites because everything becomes clear in front of His face, and that’s not good news for religious people because God does not grade on a curve. You see, the Jews thought they would get some special treatment from God, thinking that because they were the chosen ones they would get a pass. They’ll get a special deal alright, but they won’t be happy about it. Special privilege always bears greater responsibility. While Ro 2:10 states that glory, honor and peace will come first for the Jew; verse 9 states that trouble and distress will also come first for the Jew. Throughout history God has given grace first to Israel; but He has also given judgment first. Deuteronomy 10:17:

For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes.

I Should Go to Hell

I should go to Hell because that is where I belong. But, I am going to Heaven because Jesus Christ died on a cross for me. He took my punishment so that I could go free. Friend, God has done everything necessary for you go to Heaven and He has posted an enormous stop sign on the road to Hell in the shape of a cross. If the highway to Hell is paved with good intentions, the road to Heaven is paved with the blood of Christ. If you doubt that God’s wrath is real, look at what Jesus went through for you. He took upon Himself the full measure of wrath that He did not deserve, so you and I would not get what we do deserve. Our sins and our condemnation accumulate each day we serve self and not the Savior. Our case file gets thicker and thicker as the evidence mounts against us.

James Montgomery Boice pointedly states:

That wrath is thundering down the chasm of history toward the day of final judgment, and one day it must break upon you unless you stand before God in Jesus Christ.

Here’s the deal. Either you will bear the righteous wrath of God or you need a substitute to take it from you. Let me say it clearly. You don’t have to go to Hell. God has provided a way of escape for you. But even God’s way of escape will do you no good unless you reach out and take it. If you ignore Jesus, there is no hope for you. God doesn’t have a Plan B for those who reject his Son.

The Pantagraph reported that a bunch of bikers went on the road this past Tuesday to that small town on the wrong side of the lake. They dubbed their adventure the “Straight to Hell” ride. Friend, may I ask you some very personal questions with eternal ramifications?

When you die will you go straight to Hell?

Which road are you on?

Are you on the highway to Hell?

Or are you on the narrow path that leads to Heaven?

Are you on the self-centered road of rejection that leads to wrath?

Or are you on the Savior-centered path of persistence that leads to peace?

Do you know what you need to do in order to go to Hell? **Nothing!**

I turn one last time to **Jonathan Edwards**:

The use of this awful subject may be for awakening unconverted persons in this congregation...Almost every natural man that hears of hell flatters himself that he shall escape it; he depends upon himself for his own security; he flatters himself in what he has done, in what he is now doing, or what he intends to do. Every one lays out matters in his own mind how he shall avoid damnation, and flatters himself that he contrives well for himself and that his schemes will not fail.

O sinner! Consider the fearful danger you are in: it is a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit, full of the fire of wrath, that you are held over in the hand of that God, whose wrath is provoked and incensed as much against you, as against many of the damned in hell. You hang by a slender thread, with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it, and ready every moment to singe it, and burn it asunder; and you have no interest in any Mediator, and nothing to lay hold of to save yourself, nothing to keep off the flames of wrath, nothing of your own, nothing that you ever have done, nothing that you can do, to induce God to spare you one moment...Therefore, let every one that is out of Christ, now awake and fly from the wrath to come. The wrath of Almighty God is now undoubtedly hanging over a great part of this congregation. Let every one fly out of Sodom: 'Haste and escape for your lives, look not behind you, escape to the mountain, lest you be consumed.' ([Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God - Jonathan Edwards](#))

The only way to be rescued from God's wrath is by receiving what the Redeemer offers you. 1 Thessalonians 1:10 (**note**):

And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead-Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

The only way to avoid God's judgment is by trusting Jesus, for all of your guilt and condemnation was placed on Him:

The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6) (**note**).

The righteous wrath of an infinite and holy God was poured out on Christ. He suffered God's wrath in our place, as evidenced by his cry from the cross in Matthew 27:46 (**note**):

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

He was forsaken so we don't have to be.

John Piper states that whatever else our text teaches us, one thing is abundantly clear and immeasurably important:

Namely, when your life is over on this earth...God will give you either eternal life or wrath and indignation. You will receive glory and honor and peace or you will receive tribulation and distress. Heaven or Hell awaits you when you die. And both will last forever" ([The Final Divide: Eternal Life or Eternal Wrath, Part 1](#)).

We're stubborn, aren't we? In fact, if we were really honest some of us would give a different title to Edward's sermon because we're in fact upset with the Almighty. We might call it something like this: "*God in the Hands of Angry Sinners.*" When you think about it, while it's understandable to be angry at times, to stay angry with the righteous God of the universe is ultimately absurd. Does that describe you? Are you angry with Him right now?

You may think you're a Christian but maybe you're not. Perhaps you're religious but you've not been redeemed. Maybe you're just bored with everything. If so, it may be because you have not been born again. If God's kindness is not leading you to repentance, then drop by drop every sin you commit is filling up a reservoir of condemnation that will drown you and send you to damnation. You should tremble at the magnitude of what is at stake in your life. If you repent and receive Christ, you won't get what you deserve... and that's a good thing. And you'll have no reason to go to Michigan either.

"Lord Jesus, for too long I've kept you out of my life. I admit that I am a sinner and that I cannot save myself. I've been storing up wrath and I don't want to do that anymore. I repent of my sins by changing my mind about the way I've been living. I don't want to be on the self-centered road of rejection that leads to wrath. By faith I gratefully receive your gift of salvation so I can get on the Savior-centered path of perseverance that leads to peace. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for coming to earth. With all my heart I believe you are the Son of God who died on the cross for my sins and rose from the dead on the third day. Thank you for absorbing the Father's righteous wrath and giving me the gift of eternal life. I believe your words are true. I accept you into my heart. Be my Savior and Lord. I surrender to your leadership in my life. Make me into the person you want me to be. Amen."

Closing Song: [Change My Heart Oh God](#)

Romans 2:12-16 Our Secrets Will Be Revealed - 6/18/06

Last Saturday night as I was preparing to get my much-needed beauty rest, I heard a clarion call to come to the kitchen immediately. When I arrived I saw that Beth was scrubbing something off the floor as she kept looking up towards the ceiling. She told me to look up but I didn't see anything. She then pointed to the ceiling fan and then I saw something that made me scream, in a

manly sort of way. There, perched on one of the blades was a baby mourning dove! And then it hit me why Beth was cleaning up the floor.

I was just about to ask her why she hadn't captured the bird when all five women in the house declared in unison, "*Get it out of here. You're the man in the house!*" I studied the situation while the girls kept telling me to do something. I finally grabbed a chair to stand on, and with an old tablecloth in my hand, I dove at the dove. I missed and he started flying around the kitchen, sending all six of us for cover. The resulting chaos and confusion could have won us something on America's Funniest Videos. Actually, I think Lydia did take pictures of this whole adventure but I deleted them so they could not be used against me. This dumb dove made it into our laundry room and we quickly shut the doors so he couldn't escape. As I tiptoed toward him I saw that he had perched on my Packer hat! This was now war. As I tried to strangle him he flew around some more and then ended up behind our dryer.

When Beth realized that I couldn't capture this winged rat on my own, she helped me move the dryer so we could put a large bowl over him. With the help of Emily we were able to secure the bird and took him outside where we set him free. I smiled as he flew into our neighbor's yard. If you see us coughing today it's probably because we caught the bird flu from this despicable dove.

As we've been studying Romans 2 over the last couple weeks, my guess is that most of us have been ambushed by the strong words in this section of Scripture. Perhaps the sermons have caused some mourning for you. Like the dove, the words are a bit elusive and difficult to catch because there's a part of us that doesn't want to embrace them. Someone this week told me that he and a friend were trying to figure out a way to shut me down because they were tired of having their toes stepped on. I understand that because my toes hurt as well. Two weeks ago, we were all challenged to not be so judgmental and hypocritical because "God is More Kind than We Think." Last week our message was called "We're More Stubborn than We Think," and we learned about God's wrath and the horrors of Hell.

Please turn to Romans 2:12-16 (**note**) and follow along as I read:

All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.) This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares."

This section is really an explanation of Ro 2:11 (**note**): "**For God does not show favoritism**" as Paul describes two different groups of people, both of whom are busted because of their behavior. Whether someone has the law or someone has never heard the truth, both groups are guilty because of sin. Let me put the issues into two questions that this passage answers for us:

- What about those who have heard the truth?**
- What about those who've never heard the truth?**

My guess is that you're familiar with this second question, perhaps you've asked it yourself. As we've been learning through our verse-by-verse study in Romans, Paul does not pull any punches. In Ro 2:12, he makes a summary statement that covers both groups and then in Ro 2:13-15, he addresses each group, and then finally in Ro 2:16, he comes back to the theme of judgment.

Let's look at Ro 2:12 (**note**):

All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law."

The ultimate issue here is that everyone sins, whether they have been exposed to the Bible or not. Paul is laying the groundwork in this section that will hit a crescendo in Romans 3:23: (**note**)

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Those who have heard the law are judged by that law because they are sinners and those who have never heard will perish because they are guilty as well. People perish because of their sin, not because they hear or don't hear the law.

1 - What About Those Who Have Heard the Truth?

In Ro 2:13 (**note**), Paul makes it clear that it takes more than a familiarity with God's law to be declared righteous:

For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will

be declared righteous.

The Jewish people were accustomed to just hearing the law read but they were not really taught how to apply it to their lives. This is a common tendency among religious people even today. We can hear the Bible so much that we never allow it to percolate down into our hearts and then out through our hands and feet. Too many people approach the Bible like auditing a class. When I was in college I audited a class, which meant all I had to do was show up and listen. There was nothing more expected of me. I didn't have to write any papers or take any exams. I could listen without being accountable for what I heard. I tried to figure out how to do this with all my classes but I couldn't make it work!

When we just listen to the Bible, or just stare straight ahead during a sermon, in essence we're just auditing a course, in danger of becoming like those who "**hear the law**" but don't obey it. These religious people heard the law, they talked about it, and we know from Romans 2:1-2, they even judged others according to it. But they didn't love the law, for if they did they would have been much more serious about living it.

Paul then says if one wants to be declared righteous they must obey the law. This is just a hypothetical statement because it's actually impossible to completely obey the law. In fact, in Romans 3:20 (**note**), he says:

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

When we measure our motives and behavior against God's holy standards, we realize pretty quickly how far short we fall. And James 2:10 (**note**) adds that to break God's law just once means that we've broken everything:

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

While both groups are guilty before God, those who hear God's truth will be judged more severely. Jesus made this clear in Matthew 11:21-24 (**note**):

Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the Day of Judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the Day of Judgment than for you.

The Jewish cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum had heard Jesus' teaching but had rejected Him. They were amazed by His miracles but they weren't moved enough to obey Him. They had the Law and were even privileged to have the Lord in their midst but they never repented. Jesus told them that judgment day would be more bearable for the pagan cities of Tyre, Sidon, and even Sodom than it will be for them.

John MacArthur writes:

Though all unbelievers will be there, the hottest part of Hell will be reserved for those who have wasted the greatest spiritual opportunity. ([Romans 1-16 MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#))

Fellow religious people, we are in the same precarious position of presuming upon God's mercy when we talk the talk but don't walk the walk.

2 - What About Those Who Have Never Heard?

Most of us understand that those who are exposed to truth should be held responsible for not doing what they know to be true. That makes sense. But, it doesn't seem fair that those who have never heard the truth should be held accountable for what they've never heard. The question is sometimes framed like this:

What about the heathen in Africa who have never heard the gospel?

God couldn't possibly send them to Hell for not knowing about Jesus, could He?

This passage shows us that people don't perish for what they don't know, but for going against what they do know, as revealed through their conduct and their conscience.

Ro 2:14-15 (**note**) really serve as a parenthesis in Paul's argument:

(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are

written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.)

One author suggests that there are four accusers, or witnesses that testify as to why the heathen are lost:

- Creation.** God has revealed his eternal power and divine nature to everyone by what He has created. We were introduced to this concept in Romans 1:20 (**note**):

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities-his eternal power and divine nature-have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

- Conduct.** The fact that people do good deeds shows that God has stamped his goodness on them. Matthew 7:11 (**note**):

If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

The fact that people sin shows that they are guilty and accountable to live up to this standard of goodness. While the Gentiles do not have the written law, they do have a law written on their hearts.

- Conscience.** The conscience gives inner witness to God's moral law. The Jews had a written code they could read; everyone has a conscience that reads them. Creation is the witness outside of ourselves, while conscience is the witness within.

- Contemplation.** Verse 15 states that our thoughts both accuse and defend us. This is often accomplished through our memory. That reminds me of the man who consulted his doctor,

I've been misbehaving, Doc, and my conscience is troubling me,"he complained. "And you want something that will strengthen your willpower?" asked the doctor. "Well, no," said the fellow. "I was thinking of something that would weaken my conscience."

That's not a good idea.

Let's look a little more closely at the role of the conscience and that of contemplation. It was **Adam Smith** who said,

What can be added to the happiness of a man who is healthy, who is out of debt, and who has a clear conscience?

That's very similar to the goal that the Apostle Paul set for himself in Acts 24:16 (**note**),

So I strive to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

The dictionary defines **conscience** as,

The ideas and feelings within a person that tell him when he's not doing right and warn him of what is wrong.

The word itself appears about 30 times in the Bible where its primary meaning is, "*to know together, or agree with.*" (See word study on **suneidesis**) The Old Testament expresses the idea as having something on the heart and carries with it the responsibility to respond. Job put it this way when he said,

I will maintain my righteousness and never let go of it; my conscience will not reproach me as long as I live" (Job 27:6) (**note**).

Our conscience is the reflection of God in our soul; it's where we agree with Him regarding right and wrong. It is the one irreplaceable element about human beings and distinguishes us from all other life forms.

When asked to describe the place of the conscience, **John Wesley** pictured it as somewhere in the middle, under God, and above man:

It is a kind of silent reasoning of the mind, whereby those things which are judged to be right are approved of with pleasure; but those which are judged evil are disapproved of with uneasiness" (**Sermon 105 - On Conscience**).

John MacArthur writes:

When we violate our conscience, it condemns us, triggering feelings of shame, anguish, regret...anxiety, and even fear. When we follow our conscience, it commends us, bringing joy, serenity, self-respect...and

gladness" ("The Vanishing Conscience," Page 37).

The conscience is that voice within us that struggles against our background and environment to declare that an act is right or wrong regardless of the standards that surround us. When our conscience is operating correctly, the reference point is God's character and His standards. It's that part of every person which, willingly or unwillingly, responds to a universal moral law. The conscience communicates this awareness to the mind, urging us to do what is right and restraining us from doing what is wrong. We can understand its role by thinking through what happens in a courtroom. The courtroom of conscience is made up of at least three characters:

- **Witness.** Romans 2:15 (**note**) states that the "**conscience bears witness.**" Since God has placed within us an inner sense of right and wrong, the conscience stands up like a witness in court to give testimony between our outward actions and the inner law that is written on our hearts.
- **Prosecutor.** Ro 2:15 continues by saying that the conscience also serves as a Prosecutor: "... **their thoughts now accusing...** " Just as is done in court, the conscience accuses us of things that we do wrong by presenting evidence on the screen of our minds. This evidence is compiled, organized, and presented in a compelling fashion.
- **Defender.** Thankfully, the conscience not only accuses, it also *excuses* us. It condemns *and* commends. We see this in the last phrase of Ro 2:15: "... **their thoughts... now even defending them.**" There are times when we search our conscience to see if we've done anything wrong, and it defends us. During those times when even others accuse us, our conscience may stand up and say, "*You did nothing wrong. You're innocent of the charges.*"

While our conscience plays different roles in our life, its strength and ability to influence us varies. When we contemplate an action, the conscience often speaks up rather abruptly. When we're in the middle of doing something we shouldn't be doing, it's often difficult to hear it. But then, after we do something wrong, our conscience shouts loudly and urges us to make things right. It warns us as a friend before it punishes us as a judge. Or to say it another way: **Before** we do something, the conscience speaks *subtly*. **While** we're sinning, we often *silence* its influence. Then, **after** we commit the wrong, it *screams* loudly.

H. L. Mencken once said:

Conscience is a mother-in-law whose visit never ends.

The conscience is not a *guide* to live by, but a *goad* that tells us the difference between right and wrong.

One time a court magician wanted to give his king a very special gift. After careful thought and much work, he designed a ring which had a very special property. Every time the king had an evil thought or unworthy ambition, the ring began to shrink tightly around his finger, thus warning him of impending danger. The conscience is like that. It's a ring around the heart which tightens every time we violate the standards God has placed within us.

Secrets Revealed

In the courtroom of conscience, it's ultimately Jesus Christ who does the judging. Romans 2:16 (**note**):

This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

I like this **Anglican prayer**:

Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid" (As quoted by James Montgomery Boice, "Romans," page 241).

David urged his son Solomon to serve God

with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the LORD searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts."

What would people think of us if they knew everything we were thinking?

One of the most frightening verses in the Bible is Hebrews 4:13 (**note**):

Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account."

Psalm 139:2 (**note**):

...you perceive my thoughts from afar.

In Luke 12:3 ([note](#)) Jesus said that ultimately there will be no secrets:

What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs.

For those who've heard, which includes us, we will be judged by what we do with what we know to be true. For others, since everyone has a conscience and an innate sense of right and wrong, God will judge according to how well they lived up to their own moral standards. The bottom line is that we're all busted. No one will be able to make any excuses. A guilty conscience often shows up on our countenance as Isaiah 3:9 ([note](#)) says: "***The look on their faces testifies against them...***" Someone has said that in Hell the indestructible consciences of people will produce the chief torment for lost souls as every wrong attitude, every sinful action, and every caustic word will be constantly brought to mind.

In an effort to make sure that we don't just hear the Word and not put it into practice, I offer these action steps to help us live the Bible we say we love.

Living What We Say We Love

1. Recommit yourself to the Great Commission.

Everyone you know at work or school or in the neighborhood has the law of God stamped on their souls. That means God has gone before you and prepared them for the proclamation of the Word. We're praying that our five-day-club missionaries will experience this. On a grander scale, let's make sure we continue our commitment to send missionaries to the continents. Our Missions Committee is looking to support a new missionary that will be serving in one of the least reached areas of the world.

2. Treat every person with dignity.

Every person you meet has value and worth in God's eyes and should have in yours. That's why we stand up for the preborn at PBC. God has stamped his character on every individual from conception on and has placed within each person a conscience. Don't diss, despise or disapprove of someone made in the image of God. Don't ignore an individual just because they're different from you. Don't hold a grudge against someone who has God's law written on his heart.

3. What is your conscience telling you to do right now?

Did you know that ever since 1811 (when someone who had defrauded the government anonymously sent \$5 to Washington D.C.), the U.S. Treasury has operated a Conscience Fund? According to Chuck Swindoll, since that time almost \$3.5 million has been received from guilt-ridden citizens (Swindoll, "The Quest For Character," p. 70). Did you catch the story this week about how President Bush teased a reporter for wearing sunglasses during his press conference on Wednesday? After the conference, the President learned that this reporter suffers from a condition that causes degeneration of the retina and wears sunglasses to protect his eyes from ultraviolet rays. Wanting to keep his conscience clear, the President of the United States made a phone call to this reporter and apologized for what he had said. Friends, if the President can do what it takes to make something right, what about us? Is there someone you need to call? Something you need to confess?

4. Don't go against your conscience.

Have you heard that **Abraham Lincoln** is now living in Pontiac? Actually a bronze statue of him has been erected on the lawn at the courthouse. I love one of his quotes that has to do with the conscience,

I desire so to conduct the affairs of this administration that if at the end, when I come to lay down the reins of power, I have lost every other friend on earth, I shall at least have one friend left, and that friend shall be down inside of me (Today In The Word, August, 1989, p. 21).

I've heard it said that the conscience is that thing that hurts when everything else feels good. As someone else has said,

She won't listen to her conscience. She doesn't want to take advice from a total stranger.

Keep your conscience a friend not a stranger, for it is designed to help, not hurt you.

5. Start being real with God and with others.

Since our secrets will be revealed one day, let's be authentic before the Almighty right now. And, let's open up to other people. One of the safest places to do this is in a small group. In our group last week, several of us shared some secret stuff. It was refreshing and helped all of us be more real than we've been before, including me. Would you make a commitment right now that if you are

not in a small group, that you will join one by this fall? You can contact Pastor Dick for more information by sending him an email: (dick@pontiacbible.org).

6. Keep your conscience clear by holding it captive to the Word of God.

Romans 9:1 ([note](#)):

I speak the truth in Christ-I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 5:14 ([note](#)) tells us that a diet rich in God's Word will give us the ability to discern correctly:

But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

Did you catch that? It's only by "constant use" of the Bible through individual reading, small group interaction, and congregational preaching that your conscience can go from weak to strong.

Martin Luther, the point man for the Protestant Reformation, understood the critical importance of keeping his conscience clear. Listen to what he said:

My conscience is captive to the word of God. To go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise.

Friend, stay in the Word. Get under its teaching and submit to its authority. This will help keep your conscience clear.

7. Let go of false guilt and shame.

Guilt is not a bad thing if it leads you to do the right thing. Unfortunately, many of us suffer from guilt and shame even after we've confessed and made restitution. It was Garrison Keilor who said,

Guilt is the gift that keeps on giving.

Those of you who are grimacing under a load of assumed guilt would probably say that guilt is a curse, not a gift.

Some of you are so saturated with shame and grilled by guilt that you live under a constant weight of worthlessness. Listen to me carefully. You don't have to stay that way. The remedy for false guilt is to grow in grace and embrace the fruit of forgiveness. Allow these Scriptures to soak up your shame as you focus on the forgiveness of your faults.

Psalms 103:10-12 ([note](#)):

He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us."

And 1 John 1:9 ([note](#)):

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Sometimes we try to punish ourselves when we sin, don't we? It's like we're trying to pay the price for our sins. Guess what? It's impossible so we might as well stop trying. Friend, don't minimize and marginalize the blood of Jesus by implying that it's somehow not enough to purify you from all unrighteousness.

Revelation 12:10 ([note](#)) says that Satan is the "**accuser of the brethren.**" This word "accuse" ([Word study on kategoria](#)) carries with it the idea of a false accusation. If you are a born again believer, and you regularly commit to confess your sins, then Satan has nothing on you.

John 3:18 ([note](#)) reminds us that Jesus takes away the stain of shame:

Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

Some of you are so tough on yourselves that when you mess up you're ready to give up. You're accused by the evil one and by your own heart. The remedy is to grow in grace by standing on the promises of Scripture.

Romans 8:1 ([note](#)): Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Isaiah 54:17 ([note](#)) No weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you.

8. Be forgiven of real guilt and the shame of sin.

It's been said that there are few things in life more difficult to bear than a guilty conscience. 1 Samuel 25:31 refers to a conscience stained with guilt as a "**staggering burden.**" The bird in our kitchen last Saturday caused quite a ruckus. That reminds me of the classic Edgar Allan Poe poem called "The Raven." This black bird is a metaphor for his guilty conscience that constantly pokes and prods him:

"While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping, as of someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door...back into the chamber turning, all my soul within me burning, soon again I heard a tapping, something louder than before...open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and a flutter, in there stepped a stately raven...perched above my chamber door...perched and sat, and nothing more...then the bird said, 'Nevermore.' Then methought, the air grew denser, perfumed with an unseen censer swung by seraphim whose footfalls tinkled on the tufted floor. 'Wretch,' I cried, 'thy God hath lent thee... 'Prophet!' said I, 'thing of evil—prophet still, if bird or devil... tell me truly is there—balm in Gilead?—tell me—tell me I implore! Quoth the raven, 'Nevermore.' '...Leave my loneliness unbroken...take that beak from out my heart, and thy form from off my door! Quoth the raven, 'Nevermore.' And the raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting...just above my chamber door...and my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor shall be lifted—nevermore! ([Edgar Allan Poe- The Raven](#))

The only way to have your guilt lifted is by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ as Hebrews 9:14 states:

How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

Listen to these words of comfort from Hebrews 10:22 (**note**):

Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience...

Have you ever asked Jesus to forgive the guilt and shame of your sins? He took our guilt so we can experience His grace. He took our Hell so we can take His Heaven. Listen to what God says in Isaiah 1:18 from the New Living Translation:

No matter how deep the stain of your sins, I can remove it. I can make you as clean as freshly fallen snow. Even if you are stained as red as crimson, I can make you as white as wool.

Ray Pritchard sums it up well by focusing on three facts:

We must all face Jesus Christ sooner or later.

Either we face Him as Savior now, or we must face Him as judge later.

Those who prefer to face Him as Judge will live to eternally regret their decision.

([Mr. I. M. Okay Meets His Maker by Dr. Ray Pritchard - Feb 1992](#))

Don't make the mistake that so many religious people make by thinking that because they're in church they're OK. This passage teaches that religious people have the most to fear. We can wonder about the heathen who have never heard, but what about those who have heard, like you? What will you do with what you know to be true?

Invitation

Lord Jesus, I admit that I'm a sinner and that I've been serving myself and not you. I've been ignoring my conscience for much too long. I believe that you paid the price for my sins and that you can remove my deep stains. I turn from the way I've been living and invite you to come into my life. I receive you as my Savior and my Lord, my Forgiver and Leader. If there's anything in my life that you don't like, get rid of it and make me into the person you want me to be. Amen.

Romans 2:17-29 The Fatal Flaws of Religion - 6/25/06

I've been fascinated and frustrated about something for many years. Have you noticed how companies are shrinking the size of their products while keeping the packaging the same? The result is less product while the price stays the same or goes up. Marketing experts argue that consumers are more sensitive to price changes than they are to size changes so companies can get

away with less quantity. Let me demonstrate.

- Cans of Coffee. Years ago, coffee was sold in 1-pound, 2-pound or 3-pound sizes. Without making the container any smaller, now the weight of some cans is only 11 ounces.
- Shampoo. Do you remember when bottles were one pint, or 16 ounces? Now, there's less shampoo and more bottle. Notice how the cap at the top makes it seem like the bottle is bigger than it really is. This bottle is only 14.5 ounces.
- Dish Detergent. Initially the bottles shrunk because of the claim that the soap was concentrated. I've noticed over time that these smaller sizes no longer are referred to as concentrate; they've just stayed smaller while the price has not decreased.
- Orange Juice. The one-gallon container has been shrunk to 96 ounces and yet the packaging makes it look like you're still buying a whole gallon.
- Ice Cream Containers. Several companies have subtly changed the size of their containers from ½ gallon to 1.75 quarts. When consumers started complaining, some of the companies explained that the smaller size fits better in the freezer! It's almost like they're doing us a favor!

Interestingly, the packaging industry has dubbed these new containers "cheater cups" because they're designed to fool consumers. One thing companies are counting on is that it's easy to sneak a subtle change past people. Like John Stossel is fond of saying, *Give me a break!* While there is often backlash at the beginning, most consumers end up accepting the change.

As we finish [Romans 2](#) this morning, we're going to learn that many believers today are "cheater Christians," because they're fooling themselves and others. Too many religious people have pretty packaging on the outside but have downsized the amount of spirituality on the inside. Unfortunately, most people have just accepted the change. Religion has some fatal flaws for it often focuses only on the outside, and not on the inside. We could say it this way: *Ritualistic religiosity can lead to shrinking spirituality.* Several years ago, Fritz Ridenour wrote a commentary on the book of Romans and entitled it, "*How to be a Christian without Being Religious.*" He established that Christianity is a relationship, not a religion filled with rules and rituals:

- It is possible to be a Christian without being religious.*
- It is possible to be religious without being a Christian.*

Montaigne once said, "*I find no quality so easy to counterfeit as religious devotion.*" Jesus cautioned against dressing up the outside in order to hide decay and death on the inside. His words were a rebuke to the religious of His day when He declared in Matthew 23:27:

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean.

Graves were painted white every year so no one would accidentally touch a tomb and be declared unclean. Those involved in ritual and religion were nicely painted on the outside but were actually dead on the inside, and in their deadness, were defiling others.

Paul has established that the immoral Gentiles are guilty before God in Romans 1:18-32. In Romans 2:1-16, Paul busts the moralists. Our text today in Romans 2:17-29 addresses the Jews, revealing that *ritualistic religiosity can lead to shrinking spirituality.* This is the toughest group to confront because those who are religious think they have all their bases covered. As we go through this passage remember that Paul himself was raised Jewish, a descendant of Benjamin, and a Pharisee. This is good to keep in mind because he uses some pretty strong words against his own people. As a sidebar, since Jewish people have suffered terrible mistreatment over the centuries, we should not participate in any derogatory remarks about them.

But Paul is definitely not an anti-Semite even though he calls Jews out by name in verse 17: "***Now you, if you call yourself a Jew...***" He is not making an ethnic slur but rather is arguing that everyone, whether religious or irreligious, is a sinner in need of the Savior. We were introduced to this theme in Romans 1:16:

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

As we study together today, keep in mind that Paul loved Jewish people, even stating in Romans 9:3 that he was willing to be cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of those who are Jewish. We see his heart in Romans 10:1:

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.

The Jews knew that they were God's chosen people and they were very proud of it. When they introduced themselves in the first century, they often added the name "Jew" after their name: "Simon Bar-Joseph, Jew." They were also called *Hebrews* because of the language they spoke and *Israelites* because of the land they were given. By the time of Christ, the most common name they

had was that of *Jew*, which was derived from Judah, the name of one of the twelve tribes. The name “Jew” denoted their own distinctiveness, as separate from those around them. But like most of us who end up focusing on the external exhibition of religious rituals, there are some fatal flaws that we need to avoid. In order to avoid thinking this passage is just for those who are Jewish, we could substitute the word “religious” for “Jew.”

Fatal Flaw #1: Pride (Ro 3:17-18).

Proverbs 16:18 states that: ***“pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.”***

The first fatal flaw is pride. In Romans 2:17-18, we see that the Jewish people had been given four advantages that ultimately led to arrogance:

Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God; if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law.

- A reliance on the law.
- A relationship with the Lord. They actually ***“bragged”*** about this.
- A recognition of God’s will. They knew it but didn’t do it.
- A relish for moral standards.

These advantages were actually good things but when they started to brag about their special position, pride set in. They were like the puffed up Pharisee in Luke 18:11:

The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men-robbers, evildoers, adulterers-or even like this tax collector.’

Because he only prayed *about himself*, he thought he was better than those around him, believing that his sin didn’t smell as bad as others. Their religious privilege had made them self-righteous, self-centered and self-deceived snobs in pretty packages. As 1 Corinthians 8:1 says, ***“Knowledge puffs up.”*** When you think about it, it’s really absurd for us to be prideful about receiving God’s mercy and grace, isn’t it? If anything we should be broken and humbled.

I had an experience with pride this week when I received a phone call from a reporter with the L.A. Times. Apparently he was doing research for a story when he came across something I posted on my blog (www.pontiacbible.org/brian). We talked for about 10 minutes as I pontificated on the subject. He thanked me and told me that the story would be available on Wednesday on the Times’ website. When I got home I told Beth and the girls about it and was feeling pretty important. I got up early and checked and sure enough, the story was there, but with none of my quotes. Indeed, as Proverbs 29:23 says, ***“Pride brings a man low...”*** Privilege can lead to pride which often leads to presumption.

Fatal Flaw #2: Presumption (Ro 3:19-20).

When pride captures our heart, we then feel compelled to act like presumptive prophets by focusing on others, making people know how much we know. Again, part of this is good because God’s people had been given the responsibility to reach out to the pagans around them. This goes all the way back to the blessing given to Abraham when he was told in Genesis 12:3 that ***“all peoples on earth”*** would be blessed through him. Isaiah 42:6 says that they were to be: ***“a light for the Gentiles.”*** But one of the flaws of religious people is that they get pleasure out of telling others what to do. We read in Ro 3:19-20:

If you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth.

They saw themselves as...

- A guide for the blind
- A light for those in the dark
- An instructor for the foolish
- A teacher of infants

Now, before we move on, let me say that these are all good things, in and of themselves. But, because they were not living the law themselves, to use the words of Jesus in Matthew 23:24, they were ***“blind guides.”*** Their pride filled them with presumption and so they acted like prophets to other people, but in reality they were just pretenders. Their outward packaging was pretty but there’s

wasn't much happening on the inside because *ritualistic religiosity leads to shrinking spirituality.*

Fatal Flaw #3: Pretenders (Ro 3:21-22).

They loved to point out the problems that others had, but they were in the group Jesus warned others about in Matthew 23:3,

Do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.

They were quick to find fault with others while quickly forgiving their own. Take a look at Ro 3:21-22:

You, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?

These would be very shocking charges to those who boasted about their religion as this rebuke goes right to their self-perceived strengths. They were breaking at least three, if not four of the commandments. It's so easy to preach it and not practice it, isn't it? Religious people are good at telling others what to do. Isaiah 29:13 hits us right in the gut:

The Lord says: 'These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.'

I read this week about brother Brighton. He was a pompous man who was meticulous about his appearance, holding fast to many religious rules. He was a member of the most prestigious church in town and was very bothered by the behavior of the boys in his church so he decided to become their Sunday School teacher. On his first day of class, he decided to begin by teaching the boys the importance of living the Christian life so he asked them this question: "Why do people call me a Christian." After an awkward pause, one young boy piped up and said, "Maybe it's because they don't know you."

Fatal Flaw #4: Profaning (Ro 3:23-24).

Once pride takes root, we become filled with presumption and start blasting others, when in fact we're just pretenders who end up profaning the holy name of God. This can have disastrous consequences in two areas. First, verse 23 states: "***You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law?***" Notice the use of the word "brag" again. Their pride led to their downfall because they were now dishonoring the very God they claimed to be serving. Second, once we profane God, we end up pushing people away from Him and even worse; our behavior can cause others to blaspheme. We could say it this way:

When we dishonor God, those who watch us can end up despising Him.

We see this in Ro 3:24:

As it is written: 'God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.'

This is a quote from Isaiah 52:5. God's people were in captivity in Babylon because of their bad behavior. As a result, those around them thought God was unable to deliver them and so they mocked and maligned the Almighty.

Friends, it's no small matter to dishonor God by our behavior. Our lives are moral megaphones to a listening world because people believe what they behold. When Nathan confronted David for his sin with Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 12:14, he made a very strong statement:

...By doing this you have made the enemies of the LORD show utter contempt...

We are the only Jesus some people will ever know so when we behave badly, we can be directly responsible for others blaspheming God.

That's one reason we are proposing an amendment to our constitution as we recognize the need for greater accountability for our members. The proposed amendment spells out the steps that we'll take to help bring back a straying believer and addresses, "... *Any member who brings reproach upon this church by conduct unbecoming a Christian...*" Incidentally, we're also proposing some changes in membership categories and we're proposing that Elders be elected to terms with a time limit for their length of service. Members will receive this information in the mail and we've also posted it on the bulletin board in the hallway. Every member is urged to attend the business meeting on Tuesday, July 11th beginning at 6:30 p.m.

When the missionary E. Stanley Jones met with Mahatma Gandhi he asked him, "*Mr. Gandhi, though you quote the words of Christ often, why is that you appear to so adamantly reject becoming his follower?*"

Ghandi replied, "*Oh, I don't reject your Christ. I love your Christ. It's just that so many of you Christians are so unlike your Christ.*"

Let's guard against the fatal flaws of pride, presumption, pretending and profaning because *ritualistic religiosity leads to shrinking spirituality*.

Choosing Relationship

over Religion

Left to ourselves we will choose religion over relationship, form over faith, and profession in the place of possession. Ultimately, it comes down to making one of two choices.

Choice #1: We can try to prove our religion by outward signs (Ro 2:25-27).

Paul knocks down all their props and now goes after the one sign in which the Jew prided himself as a member of the covenant – circumcision. Since this subject will appear again in Romans 4, I'll let Pastor Jeff explain it to you in greater detail when he preaches five weeks from today. Have you noticed a theme here? Pastor Jeff always “volunteers” to preach on the tough topics; two of his previous messages have been on tithing and homosexuality so as I see it he might as well handle circumcision as well.

For the Jew, circumcision was a holy mark on the body, a physical reminder that he belonged exclusively to God. Unfortunately, this rite had become the supreme symbol for Jewish superiority. Suffice it to say that while circumcision was an important sign for the Jew, it was not a ticket to heaven. We fall into the same trap when we think that an outward sign like baptism or communion or church membership somehow saves us. Remember this: *The rite without the reality is empty* because to God, heart matters are the heart of the matter. Charles Hodge writes:

Whenever true religion declines, the disposition to lay undo stress on external rites is stressed. The Jews when they lost their spirituality supposed that circumcision had the power to save them.”

Have you been trusting in a rite or do you have a relationship with Christ?

Choice #2: Praise our Redeemer through inward spirituality (Ro 2:28-29).

The key is to focus on relationship. God is always more interested in what's on the inside than He is on the outside as 1 Samuel 16:7 says:

The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.

Paul wraps up his argument in Romans 2:28-29 by trying to get religious people to take their focus off what is external:

A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God.

Notice the four contrasts in these two verses:

- Outward vs. Inward
- Physical vs. Heart
- Written Code vs. The Spirit
- Men vs. God

The only way you and I can experience renewal is by allowing the Redeemer to change us. We need inner transformation that can only come from the purifying presence of the Holy Spirit, which results in a burning desire to please and praise God. If we please God, it doesn't matter whom we displease. But if we displease God, it doesn't matter whom we please. I love this statement from John Piper: *“God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.”* Look with me at the last sentence in Romans 2: ***“Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God.”*** Paul is actually using a pun here. The word “Jew” comes from Judah and means “praise.” One who is only religious will focus on external things so that others will praise him. The true believer is one who has an inner relationship with Christ, resulting in praise from God.

Application

Let's look at five ways we can put this passage into practice so that we avoid the fatal flaws of pride, presumption, pretending and profaning.

1. Live what you say you believe – no matter what.

I'll never forget an experience I had on my first trip to Trinity Bible Church in Biloxi. After visiting what remained of an 85-year-old widow's home that has since been demolished, we went to the prayer meeting that Pastor Gerry led. He had us go around the room and give our names. We all did but when we got to her she said, "My name's not important" and then quoted Isaiah 26:3:

He will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast because he trusts in Him.

In the midst of all their loss, believers are living out their love for Jesus. I wonder if we would be the same way. There's one thing that almost everyone from our four teams commented on after they returned from Biloxi. They would say something like this: "Wow, I can't believe they are so joyful and peaceful in the midst of all their problems!" The only way that is possible is by focusing on our inner relationship, not outward rituals.

It's our privilege to have Pastor Gerry and Jan with us today. I'm going to ask them to stand.

"Gerry and Jan, you model for us what it means to live what you say you believe—no matter what. When people in Biloxi were fleeing the city after the storm, you guys drove around the roadblocks and ignored the curfew so you could find your people. When someone warned you that you could go to jail for this, you said, 'Well, then I'll comfort those who are in jail.' You never turned your phones off as you were available to your people night and day. We are your partners and we love you. Thanks for being Jesus to those on the Gulf Coast and for being Jesus to us."

2. Practice what you preach – and make it right when you don't.

I read a story in the Pantagraph this week about a mayor in Ohio who realized that he had violated a city policy that he had helped write. Calculating his own fine, he paid \$368 for his infraction. During a news conference he made this refreshing statement: "How can I say to a city employee, 'Don't do that,' if I do it?" Is there anything you need to make right? Are you living what you say you believe at work? When you're at school? When you're at home? If not, own up for it and make sure your walking reflects your talking.

3. It's time to become completely committed – not half hearted.

As I look ahead to this next year I believe that God wants us as a church to focus in two main areas:

- Growing in Depth
- Getting out of Debt

I'll talk more about both of these at our business meeting on July 1st but let me just share one more story from Biloxi. In December I was up on a roof with Brian Tumbleson. It was hot and we were getting a bit discouraged. I looked over at Brian and saw that he was crying. When I asked him if he was OK, he told me that as he was feeling tired and wanting to take a break, the sound of nail guns on the roof became very riveting. He told me that he started thinking of how the nails pierced the Savior on our behalf and he was just overcome with tears and a renewed commitment to keep on serving. This was one of the most sacred experiences I've ever had in twenty years as a pastor for Brian was worshipping His Savior as he worked. This man is sold out to the Savior. There's nothing half-hearted about him.

In his book called "Early Christians of the 2nd Century, Chad Walsh writes:

Millions of Christians live in a sentimental haze of vague piety... demanding little more than lip service to a few harmless platitudes... It is much safer from Satan's point of view to vaccinate a man with a case of mild Christianity so as to protect him from the real thing."

Do you have the real thing? If not, it could be that your religion is keeping you from growing.

4. Make sure you have a relationship – not just religious rituals.

Are you just going through the motions? It's time to make sure you are really in a relationship with Jesus Christ.

The way to begin is by personally receiving what Jesus has done for you on the cross as John 1:12 says:

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

5. Grow on the inside – so it shows on the outside.

Most of us look pretty good on the outside. Let's stop trying to make our product look pretty while our insides are shriveling away.

Since it's true that *ritualistic religiosity leads to shrinking spirituality*, it's also true that a *relationship with the Redeemer leads to sweet spirituality*. Then what's on the inside will become visible as 2 Corinthians 4:7 states:

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

In one of the interviews with the Pantagraph or the Daily Leader on Friday, Pastor Gerry gave all the credit to God when he said, *"It's not about Pastor Gerry. God uses simple people so all the glory goes to Him."* Amen.

We are just clay pots, designed to be filled by Jesus. Don't be a "cheater Christian." Let the all-surpassing power of God flow from the inside to the outside. When people look at your packaging, what do they see? How much product is in your package?

Missing Roman 3:1-8 Missing

Romans 3:9-20 We've All Blown It-7/9/06

It had been a long day for the clerk at the cosmetic counter. Having been on her feet all day, she was looking forward to going home. Just before the doors closed, a man came running up to her frantically and said, *"Tomorrow's my wife's birthday and I don't have anything for her. What do you recommend?"* The clerk brought out a nice bottle of perfume worth about \$100. He gasped and said, *"That's way too expensive!"* So she held up a bottle that cost \$50. He said, *"That's still too expensive. What do you have that's less expensive?"* She searched some more and found something for \$25. The husband replied, *"That's still too expensive! What else do you have?"* She then brought out the cheapest thing she had at the counter, a tiny \$10 bottle of perfume. He was now exasperated and said, *"You don't understand. I want you to show me something cheap!"* She quickly reached under the counter, pulled out a mirror, told him to look into it and said, *"Try this!"*

Mirrors don't lie, do they? This mega mirror that I have here today is nothing to mess around with. It not only comes with bright lights but it also has a magnifying feature so that you can see more than you want to see. Let me demonstrate. As I look into this mirror I see that I need a haircut and that I'm starting to show some silver highlights. I also see that in my haste to shave this morning I missed a few whiskers. I also notice that I have a "uni-brow" that my daughters tell me I should pluck. My forehead looks a bit greasy and I have this ugly scar across my chin which is a visible reminder of the car accident I had when I was 17. I'm sure I could find additional imperfections if I studied my reflection some more but frankly what I've seen already is quite frightening. I think I'll just get up and walk away from this for awhile.

James 1:23-24 says,

Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

The Bible is a mirror that reflects with pinpoint precision what we are really like. And it's not a pretty sight because sin has left a significant scar on each of us.

John Calvin wrote:

The Bible is like a mirror. In it we see our imperfections and the curse that comes with it just as a mirror shows us the spots on our face.

It's like the person who took his pictures back to the photographer and said, *"I want my money back. These pictures don't do me justice."* The photographer looked at the pictures and said, *"You don't need justice, you need mercy!"*

As we've been learning from our study in Romans, the picture that Paul paints of the human race is not a pretty sight. The good news is that he's almost done speaking about sin. The bad news is that what we are faced with today is perhaps the strongest statement on sin in all of Scripture. This vivid description of human depravity will make most of us want to turn away. But we can't and we won't because the gospel will only become good news when we first understand the bad news. Mercy only makes sense when we commiserate about our misery. Grace is amazing only to those who are annihilated by guilt. As we come to our text today, Paul gets to the punch line of what he's been saying for three long chapters.

- The whole world is under God's wrath (1:18)
- The Gentiles are guilty (1:18-32)
- The Moralists are guilty (2:1-16)

- The Jews are guilty (2:17-29)
- No excuses will be accepted (3:1-8)

Please turn in your copy of the Scriptures to Romans 3:9-20. As Pastor Dick pointed out last week, the Apostle Paul is fond of using diatribes in the Book of Romans, where he asks and answers questions. In our culture, we might refer to them as FAQ's, or Frequently Asked Questions. This section begins with two simple questions that are quickly answered in verse 9. Then, utilizing a string of Scripture that is expertly woven together, Paul holds up the mirror of the Word to show us just how sinful we really are. Interestingly, Paul does not begin with an introduction, but with his conclusion.

The Conclusion

(Ro 3:9)

In Ro 3:9 Paul restates the basic charge:

What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin.

When it comes to sin, no one has a pass. Whether Jewish or Gentile, moral or immoral, religious or irreligious, everyone is under sin. No group is guiltier than another and no individual is exempt. Pontiac is guilty and so is Chenoa, Gridley and Graymont. Dwight is busted and so is Odell and Mazon and Minonk. Flanagan is at fault and so is Saunemin, Lexington, Fairbury, Forrest and Cullom. Saunemin is sinful and so is Streator. Illinois has messed up and so has Michigan (OK, even Wisconsin is under sin as well). North Korea is sinful and so is the United States of America. I'm a sinner...and so are you. I like what that famous theologian Pogo once said, "*We have met the enemy and he is us.*"

Paul is "***making the charge***" which is a legal term often used to describe someone who was indicted for a certain offense. The phrase "under sin" is a military term that means "under the authority of someone." In this case it means that everyone alike is under the control of sin. The idea is similar in meaning to Galatians 3:10:

All who rely on observing the law are under a curse...

We are first introduced to the controlling nature of sin when it is personified as a master in Genesis 4:7:

Sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.

Jesus adds in John 8:34:

I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

Interestingly, Paul uses the word "sin" approximately 48 times in Romans not in the plural to denote sinful acts, but in the singular to refer to the human condition being under the dominating force of sin. We've all blown it and we're all busted. We sin because we *are* sinners.

Many years ago G.K. Chesterton sent a letter to the editor of a newspaper in response to the question, "What is wrong with the world today?" Here was his answer: "*Dear sir, I am.*" It was the shortest letter they had received on the subject but it was also the most profound. He must have been reading Romans 3. After stating his conclusion, Paul moves on to a 13-count indictment that covers the condition, the conversation, the conduct, and the complacency of the accused.

Our Condition

(Ro 3:10-12)

Paul has appealed to creation and the conscience and now he drives home the conviction that comes from Scripture itself. Notice the little phrase in verse 10: "***As it is written...***" This is a common expression in the Book of Romans, stated on 16 different occasions. I love that this is in the present tense, meaning that the Bible still speaks, right now, into our situation. It's not a dead book, but rather is "***living and active***" as Hebrews 4:12 says. Paul is not speaking from his own authority but from the authority of the authoritative Word of God. Jesus also quoted the Scriptures on a regular basis.

Matthew 4:4 is but one example of many:

It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'

Let me suggest an application at this point. One of the missionaries on our team in Mexico City once told me that he was trying to interject Scripture into every conversation he had. Sometimes it would be an actual quote and other times it was a paraphrase but

he worked at getting the Word into his words so that what came out of his mouth would benefit those who listen. Let's try to do the same thing, shall we? By the way, I think that's why Billy Graham is so effective at evangelism. If you listen to him preach, he continuously repeats this refrain, *"The Bible says..."*

Most of the passages that Paul quotes are from the Book of Psalms, with one from Isaiah and one from Ecclesiastes. It's as if he is saying,

"All I have to do is go to Israel's songbook to prove that we are all sinful. If I can find sin in the midst of all these songs, I can certainly find it in the other books of the Bible."

Before we look at our condition, could you just underline or circle the words "no one," "all," "not even one" in these two verses? Let's read them together:

As it is written: 'There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.'

We are not in good shape are we? Let's look at our condition more closely.

No one is righteous. God judges according to His own sinless perfection and compared to His holiness we are not even close to His righteousness. To prevent any of us thinking that maybe there's an exception to this, other than Jesus, Paul adds, ***"not even one."*** Compared to each other, some of us have relatively more or less righteousness, but held up to God's holiness, no one is righteous. Not all are equally sinful but all are equally sinners.

No one understands. While we can all learn about God, apart from God's enablement, no one can fully understand Him.

1 Corinthians 2:14: ***"The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned."***

My in-laws just returned from a trip to Israel. Their tour guide did a fantastic job but they marveled at how he could know so much about the holy land and what Jesus taught and still not be a believer.

Apart from God's Spirit, as Ephesians 4:18 says, those who are unsaved are ***"darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them..."***

No one seeks God. While it may appear that there are some that are actually seeking hard after God, on their own, people are actually running *from* God. The word "seek" here means to "seek with determination." Once again, if God does not draw someone to Himself, they cannot get there on their own as Jesus makes clear in John 6:44:

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him."

I was involved in "seeker ministry" for six years and while I celebrate what God is doing through this strategy, I've come to realize that the seeker we must be most sensitive to is the Savior, for He is the one who came ***"to seek and to save the lost"*** (Luke 19:10).

All have turned away. This phrase was used to describe a soldier who had deserted his post. When God looked at His people in Exodus 32:8, He declared: ***"They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them..."***

Instead of running toward God we are running away because we have a bias toward disobedience and want to do things our own way as Isaiah 53:6 says:

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way...

Ecclesiastes 7:29 adds that ***"men have gone in search of many schemes."***

Together have become worthless. The word "worthless" is very descriptive for it was used to describe something rancid like sour milk. I experienced something similar last weekend when the night crawlers we were using to fish with sat out in the sun a little too long and had become downright gross and slimy and smelly. When I opened the cover the next morning I almost passed out. In a similar way God is grossed out by our rancid unrighteousness.

No one who does good. Wanting to make sure we get the point, Paul repeats the refrain that not even one person does good.

Ecclesiastes 7:20: ***There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins.***

Our Conversation

(Ro 3:13-17)

After describing our condition, Paul turns next to our conversation. This makes sense for what comes out of our mouths has its source in our hearts as Jesus said in Matthew 12:34:

You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.

Most people sin by what they say and how they say it. Have you ever wished you could take back something you've said that really hurt someone? I have. That's why in Proverbs 6, when God mentions six things He hates, three of them have to do with what we say.

Let's read Romans 3:13-16 together:

Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit." "The poison of vipers is on their lips." "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.

Paul traces how human depravity has infected the human anatomy:

- Throats.** The Living Bible paraphrases it this way: ***"Their talk is foul and filthy like the stench of an open grave."*** Using a very graphic word picture, Paul is saying that the throat is to the heart what an open grave is to the corpse within it. Graves are designed to be covered in respect for the deceased and to also protect those who pass by so they don't have to see the disfigurement or smell the decay. The phrase "open grave" literally means a yawning grave. I guess that means we should be careful when we yawn so that people don't see down our throats into our decaying hearts.
- Tongues.** The tongue literally ***"practices deceit."*** That means that we've been deceitful so much that we've actually become good at it. Have you ever noticed that you don't have to teach a child how to lie? It just comes naturally.
- Lips.** The poison of vipers is very descriptive. Similar to our rattlesnakes a viper had a sac full of venom in its throat that was unleashed through hollow fangs when provoked. Our lips can unleash venomous verbiage that poisons the people around us.
- Mouths.** Before I was saved I had a very foul mouth, out of which came both cursing and bitterness. The word "cursing" carries the idea of desiring the worst for a person by open criticism and public defamation. Bitterness describes openly-expressed emotional hostility toward someone. Out of the bitterness of the heart flows the cursing of the mouth. David describes a person like this in Psalm 64:3-4:

They sharpen their tongues like swords and aim their words like deadly arrows. They shoot from ambush at the innocent man; they shoot at him suddenly, without fear.

Our Conduct

(Ro 3:17)

Because of our depraved condition, our conversations are filled with decaying and depraved words. But it doesn't stop there because by nature we also end up doing deeds that are destructive. Look at Ro 3:17:

Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know.

Our world history is filled with mass extermination, wars, and random crime. According to Kerby Anderson, as posted on www.leaderu.com,

"In America, the crime clock continues to click: one murder every 22 minutes, one rape every 5 minutes, one robbery every 49 seconds, and one burglary every 10 seconds.

We are a very violent society as evidenced by Columbine, and the journals and notes of the killers that have just become available this week. Dr. Alan Barnett, a statistician with MIT, says a child born in America has a greater statistical probability of being murdered than did an American soldier who left for World War II. Actually the most violent place to be today is in a mother's womb, with over 43 million babies murdered since 1973.

From head to foot sin has permeated everything. Ro 3:17 ends by stating that most people actually move away from peace rather than toward being peacemakers: ***"and the way of peace they do not know."*** We're going to help spell out the way of peace in a four-part sermon series in November.

Our Complacency

(Ro 3:18)

Why is it that our condition is so messed up? Why are our conversations filled with decay and death? Why is our conduct so violent? The answer in large part is found in Ro 3:18 where we read of yet one more body part tainted by sin: **“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”** We have become complacent towards God. We take our sin too lightly because we take God too lightly.

This could be paraphrased: *“They care nothing about God or what He thinks about them.”* In his book called “The Discipline of Grace,” Jerry Bridges writes:

When we sin we are in effect treating God and His Word with disdain or contempt.]

We could say it this way:

Every sin has its roots in our rejection of God and our refusal to revere Him.

I'm convinced that the best way to experience victory over sin in our lives is to cultivate a healthy fear of God. Proverbs 9:10:

...through the fear of the LORD a man avoids evil.

After the giving of the 10 Commandments, the people become afraid of the quaking mountain and the thunder and the lightning. Moses tried to settle their nerves by telling them they didn't have to be afraid, but they did need to fear God. Listen to Exodus 20:20: **“Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.”** I think the evangelical church in America, including ours, could stand to fear God much more than we do. The early church sure learned about this after Ananias and Sapphira lost their lives because of their lies in Acts 5:11: **“Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.”** They were in awe of His greatness and had a holy dread of violating His standards.

Let's get practical here. When we sin, or are tempted to sin, we usually follow whatever is put before our eyes. If we can consciously keep God before our eyes and focus on the fear that is due His name, we will not want to sin. In other words, when God is “big” we are careful with our conduct; and when we “shrink” Him or ignore Him, we're more apt to do what we want to do. Psalm 101:3: **“I will set before my eyes no vile thing.”** Let's be like David who prayed in Psalm 86:11: **“Give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.”**

Taken together, these verses teach that sin has infected and affected our condition, our conversation, our conduct, and our complacency. Holding up the mirror of the Word of God, we affirm the historic Protestant doctrine of Total Depravity. We are totally depraved, not just deprived. We don't need more education, or more money, or more anything. We can't blame our environment or our background. We've all blown it and are busted. As someone has said, *“If sin were blue, we'd be blue all over.”* Part would be dark blue, part would be sky blue, part would be light blue, but every part would be blue in some shade or another.

Our Condemnation

(Ro 3:19-20)

After spelling out the indictment, Paul makes his closing argument in verses 19-20 to show that we are all condemned: **“Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.”** I see three truths from these two verses.

- We will be silenced before God.** As we come face-to-face with the mirror of God's Word and see our scars of sin, we will be silenced before Him. This word literally means, *“To stop muttering.”* There is nothing we can say, no excuse we can think up. We've blown it and we're busted. Psalm 107:42: **“...all the wicked shut their mouths.”** When confronted with the majesty and mystery of God, Job realized that he had nothing to say in Job 40:4-5:

I am unworthy-how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer- twice, but I will say no more.

Salvation comes only to those who are silenced by their sinfulness. Until you and I stop complaining, blaming and making excuses, we cannot be saved. Hell is filled with people who simply would not stop talking. We must own our sin and be silent before the Savior.

- We are accountable to the Almighty.** This is a legal term, which means that we are liable before God. We are guilty as charged. Everyone will appear before the Almighty and give an account of their lives. Are you ready for judgment day?

- The Law helps us see that we are lawbreakers.** J.B. Phillips renders verse 21 this way: ***“It is the straightedge of the law that shows us how crooked we are.”*** Contrary to popular belief, the keeping of the Law is impossible because it was given to expose sin. Turn over to Romans 7:7:

Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law.

Galatians 2:16 says,

Know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

My daughter Lydia and I ran in a 5K race on the 4th of July. The route was mapped out clearly as the first half-mile went straight up a steep hill. I struggled, huffing and puffing as I lumbered up the road. Lydia kept looking back at me, wondering if I would make it as she asked, *“Daddy, are you OK?”* When she saw me looking for a place to sit down, she’d say, *“Come on, daddy, you can do it.”* I finished the race with a time of 26:53, placing 20th out of 31 in my age group and 296th out of 579 runners. Like I often say, I may be short...but I’m slow! The winner ran a time of 15:22. A lot of people did better than me, including Lydia, and I finished ahead of some others. But I was nowhere near the top.

Imagine if you will that God set the standard for the winner, not at 15 minutes but at 3.2 minutes. Do you know anyone who can run a one-minute mile? It’s impossible. Likewise, in the race of life, you may finish ahead of someone else, or behind others, but the fact of the matter is that no one is good enough to meet God’s standards. We need help, don’t we? Our only hope is to put our faith and trust in Christ who finished the race in record time. He is the only sinless Son of God who died as our substitute on the Cross. When we place our faith and trust in Him, His time is credited to our account and we are declared righteous, not by what we have done but by what He has done.

When we look into the mirror of God’s Word, it becomes clear pretty quickly that we need an extreme makeover. We are deeply deprived, hopelessly lost, but incredibly loved.

Conclusion

R. C. Buckner, a big, bold and brash man, lived about 100 years ago in Texas. This imposing figure had a very tender heart for children, starting Buckner’s Children’s Homes all across the state. The children affectionately called him “Papa Buckner” and would run up to him every time he visited. He would always take the time to pick up each and every child and give them a hug.

One day he was visiting one of the homes and was hugging all the children gathered around him when he noticed a little girl who was standing with her face against the wall. He discovered that she had been seriously burned in an accident, and had a terrible scar on her face. He went over to her and asked, *“Sweetheart, don’t you want Papa Buckner to hug you?”* Without turning around she snarled, *“No, I’m too ugly.”* Papa Buckner knelt down, picked her up in his burly arms, turned her face gently toward his, looked right into her eyes and then planted a tender kiss right on the burned portion of her face. After he kissed her, he said, *“Sweetheart, you are beautiful to me, and you are beautiful to God.”*

Fellow sinner, the holy and awesome God of the universe has bent down and kissed the scars of our sin when He sent the Savior to the world. In spite of our hideous deformities and our unholy depravity, He wraps His arms around us, turns our face toward His and says, *“You are beautiful to me!”*

I’d like you to take out your bulletin right now and find the “Sermon Notes” insert. You’ll notice that we’ve put a post-it note on this sheet. I’d like you to take a pen and write these words on the note:

I’ve blown it, but I’m beautiful to God

I’m fatally flawed, but fully forgiven

Please take this post-it note off this sheet and when you get home I want you to put it on the mirror in your bathroom as a daily reminder of how much God loves you.

Commitment

Once when D. L. Moody was preaching he told his audience to come back the next week and he would tell them how to get saved. That night was the great Chicago fire and he never got that chance to give an invitation. He determined from then on that he would always give people an opportunity to respond to the gospel message. Likewise I was tempted to have you wait until next week

because our topic will be “How to Be Right With God” but I don’t want make the same mistake that Moody did. Allow me to explain how you can be saved using the ABCs.

Admit your condition as a depraved sinner. Own up to the fact that your conversations have been filled with decay. Confess that your conduct has been destructive and that you’ve been complacent toward God. Are you ready to be silent before Him as you confess your sins?

Believe that Jesus died as your substitute. He came to seek and to save the lost and to give his life as a ransom for your sins.

Commit yourself to Him for the rest of your life. John 1:12 says, **“But to as many as received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”**

If you sense God drawing you to Himself right now, you could make these words your own as we pray together:

Lord Jesus, I’m silenced by my sinfulness. I admit that I’ve blown it big time and my sins are repugnant to you. I confess that I have not feared you. I repent and turn to you right now. I believe that you died the death I deserved. I accept your perfect score and commit myself to you now by asking you to come into my life. Make me into the person you want me to be. Amen.”

Romans 3:21-25 How to be Right With God -7/16/06

I heard this week about a guy who bought a new refrigerator and didn’t know what to do with his old one so he put it in his front yard with a sign that said, *“Free to good home. You want it – you take it.”* For three days the fridge sat there without even one person looking at it. He eventually decided that people were too untrusting of this deal because they thought it was too good to be true. So he took the old sign off and made a new one: *“Fridge for sale – \$50.”* The next day someone stole it.

Most of us are skeptical when something seems too good to be true, especially when it has great value and we’re told that it’s free. Last week we learned from what is perhaps the strongest statement on sin in all of Scripture that we are totally depraved in our condition, our conversations, our conduct, and our complacency. As a result, we are condemned and because of our sin we are silenced before God.

An illustration of how sin has infected our conversations and our conduct was displayed in front of the entire world on Sunday afternoon during the World Cup Soccer championship. A player from Italy allegedly used his tongue to criticize a player from France, either insulting his mother and sister or calling him a terrorist, depending on what sources you read. The French player, the star of his team, apparently heard enough and so he turned around and head-butted the Italian player right in the chest, knocking him to the ground. He was disqualified from the match and his team went on to lose the championship. I read this week that now his mother is taking some verbal shots at the Italian player.

After hearing all these sermons on sin it would be easy to think that we are somehow disqualified before God. We know we’ve blown it in multiple ways and though our sins are not broadcast around the world we recognize that God sees everything. We might not have ever stolen a refrigerator but we’ve sinned in other ways. Romans 3:10 summarizes our desperate state:

There is no one righteous, not even one.

As we come to our text in Romans today, we’re turning a corner. For 10 sermons now, covering two and a half chapters, we’ve been hit with how unholy we are. The weekly refrain has been:

We’ve blown it! We’ve blown it! We’ve blown it! We’ve blown it! We’ve blown it! We’ve blown it! We’ve blown it! We’ve blown it! We’ve blown it! We’ve blown it!

As we come to the first two words of Romans 3:21, it almost seems too good to be true: **“But now…”** Paul is indicating that what is to come next will be refreshing, amazing, and free. *Then* I was lost in sin, *but now* I am saved! The man born blind in John 9 certainly experienced this when he declared with exuberance in Jn 9:25:

One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!

Let’s all breathe a collective sigh of relief right now by saying together, *“Whew! I was blind but now I see!”* As we were reminded last week, even though we’ve blown it, we’re beautiful to God; we’re fatally flawed, but fully forgiven. I trust that you’ve put these words up on your mirror so that when you see your imperfect reflection, you’re also reminded of God’s great love for you.

Before we go much further, I’d like to make two preliminary points:

- ☐ **This section of Scripture has been called the heart of the Bible.** Commenting on this passage Leon Morris said *“this is possibly the most important single paragraph ever written.”*

The Reformers referred to this section as the “marrow of the Bible.” You’d be hard pressed to find any other passage as meaty and profound. Because of that, I’m going to focus just on Ro 3:21-25a and we’ll pick up the rest of this chapter next week. If last week’s sermon was saturated with the stench of sin, this week we’ll experience the sweet showers of salvation as we move from guilt to grace and from God’s wrath to His righteousness.

- ☐ **This passage actually picks up the thought from Romans 1:17.** In chapter one, Paul introduces the theme of righteousness: *“For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed...”*

Romans 3:21 uses the exact same phrase: *“righteousness from God...has been made known...”*

In between these two verses God demonstrated His righteousness in His judgment of sin. We might be tempted to say that Paul has digressed and now he is back on the topic of the Gospel. This would not be true, however. Our sin must be clearly identified and God’s wrath fully explained in order for the Gospel to be truly good news.

We can capture the main theme of this passage in one sentence. Let’s say it together: *God’s righteousness has made a way for us to be right with Him.* Paul gives us six facets of righteousness that we need to understand if we truly want to be right with God. Let’s read Romans 3:21-25 together:

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood...

1. Righteousness is from God (Ro 3:21a).

This passage helps us see salvation from God the Father’s perspective. Look at Ro 3:21: **“a righteousness from God...”** This is repeated in Ro 3:22. Since no one was born righteous, the only source of righteousness is God himself. Ro 3:25 says that **“God presented Him...”** and in Ro 3:26 we learn that the Father did all this to **“demonstrate His justice.”** Too often we view salvation from our perspective alone; selfishly focusing only on how it benefits us.

Imagine that I am a passenger on a ship bound for New York City. My ship has an explosion and sinks and I am the lone survivor. As I float helplessly in the water I know that I am doomed to die because I can do nothing to save myself. Just then a ship suddenly appears on the horizon and someone spots me. The ship turns from its course and stops to rescue me. I should be grateful that I have been spared and overjoyed just to be alive. But if I start to think that the ship’s main purpose was to save me, then I will think I can tell the ship to turn around or expect the captain of the ship to accommodate my every need. When we make this mistake, God becomes our servant, the one who is there just to “meet our needs.” While we are the beneficiaries of salvation, God has provided a way for us to be right with Him in order to proclaim His righteousness and to promote His purposes. To say it theologically, we must become “theocentric” and “doxological,” recognizing that God and His glory are to be at the center of everything; not “anthropocentric,” which means human-centered.

2. Righteousness does not come from what we do (Ro 3:21b).

Notice next that this righteousness from God is **“apart from the law.”** This would have been very troubling to those from a Jewish background. As we established last week, you and I can’t get right with God by keeping the law, because it is impossible to keep. The law does however, reveal the righteousness of God. Look at the last phrase of Ro 3:21: **“...to which the Law and the Prophets testify.”** The fact that being right with God comes apart from the law is not a new discovery. It’s exactly what the Old Testament teaches. We’ll look at this in greater detail next week as we shine the spotlight on Abraham’s life as recorded in the “Law” section of Scripture. Habakkuk 2:4 is but one example from the Prophets: **“...But the righteous will live by his faith.”**

Let’s recite the main theme again: *God’s righteousness has made a way for us to be right with Him.*

3. Righteousness comes only to those who recognize their sinfulness (Ro 3:22-23).

The amazing truth about God’s righteousness is that it is for sinners only:

There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

It’s difficult for us to fathom but in God’s eyes there is no difference between the serial killer and the social worker. Ray Pritchard writes:

When it comes to needing salvation, there is truly 'no difference' between people. Since all are sinners, all need salvation.

When David Dykes was in seminary, one of his assignments was to study eight of Billy Graham's sermon manuscripts to find out how many times he quoted Romans 3:23. Amazingly, in one crusade, Billy Graham proclaimed these words fifty-six times:

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

The phrase **"all have sinned"** is in the past tense and hearkens back to the earlier verses in Romans 3. Everyone, without exception, has sinned. The word "sin" literally means to miss a target. It's the picture of an archer whose arrows always come up short of even hitting the target, much less the bull's-eye. We are sinners by character and we sin by our conversations and our conduct. The Westminster Shorter Catechism defines it this way:

To sin is to break God's law by omission or commission.

We **"fall short of the glory of God"** means that in the present tense we perpetually come up short. God's glory is the sum of all his attributes, His weightiness, and His worth. [Ezekiel 1](#) describes God's glory in an amazing way. Some rabbis would not allow young men under the age of thirty to even read this chapter because the depiction of God's glory is so awesome. The phrase "fall short" comes from an athletic contest and was used of a runner who fell down and never reached the finish line. When Lydia and I ran that 5K race on the 4th of July, we saw a runner who pulled his hamstring and was down for the count. He started out strong but never finished the race. I actually thought of faking this kind of injury so I wouldn't have had to finish! I am so glad that *God's righteousness has made a way for us to be right with Him.*

4. Righteousness is based on the grace of God (Ro 3:24a).

God's glory is a target I can never hit and a race I can never finish. It's also a gift I can never earn. Ro 3:24 says that we are **"justified freely by his grace."** The word **"freely"** literally means "without a cause." Salvation comes without any cause in us. Forgiveness is given freely to those who don't deserve it, to those who actually deserve condemnation. And that's exactly what grace is. This definition of grace is helpful and easy to remember because it uses the letters of the word: **God's Riches At Christ's Expense.** Grace is God's unmerited favor but it's actually more active than that. It is God's free favor bestowed on those who deserve His condemnation at the cost of His Son. We see this clearly in Romans 5:8:

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

I heard a story the other day about a guy who died and stood before the gates of heaven. An angel met him and said, *"We have a new plan for getting into heaven. We're now using a point system and you need 1,000 to enter."* The man told the angel that this would be no problem as he started rattling off his accomplishments:

I was a member of Pontiac Bible Church for 30 years, taught Sunday School and tithed my income. I went on mission trips, handed out Bibles, and invited a lot of people to church. The angel replied, *"That's nice. Let's see. That's worth one point. You only need 999 more. What else?"* The man thought for a minute and said, *"I was married to the same woman for 50 years, was involved in a food pantry, was an honest businessman and never cheated on my income tax. What about that?"* To which the angel said, *"Well, that's worth another point. Now you only need 998 points."* The man was frustrated and said with exasperation: *"You know at this rate it's going to take the grace of God to get me in this place!"* The angel responded, *"That's worth 1,000 points."*

Friends, let's say it again: *God's righteousness has made a way for us to be right with Him.*

5. Righteousness is provided by the death of Christ (Ro 3:24b-25a).

Look with me at Ro 3:24-25 where we are introduced to three vivid word pictures:

And are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood...

Let's look closely at each of these wonderful words. I'm reminded of the preacher who mixed up his words one Sunday by telling people he was going to "confound" the Scriptures when he meant that he was going to "expound," or explain them. I sure hope I don't end up confounding you, for as Howard Hendricks says, *"A mist in the pulpit is a fog in the pew."*

Unfortunately, the church has experienced the death of some really great words as we have for the most part become biblically and theologically illiterate. Benjamin Warfield, who died more than 80 years ago, made this very perceptive and prophetic statement: *"What we are doing today as we look out upon our current religious modes of speech, is assisting in the deathbed of a word... worthy words do die...if we do not take care of them...I hope you will...preserve them in life and vigor...But the dying of the words is not the saddest thing which we see here. The saddest thing is the dying out of the hearts of men of the things for which the words*

stand..." We have fallen even further since Warfield's day to our own peril and impoverishment. Let's resurrect three words this morning found in Ro 3:24-25 and make sure we never let them die again. The three words are justification, redemption, and propitiation.

- ☐ **Justification.** This is a legal term from the world of law. To justify means to "declare not guilty." I've heard some people say that it means "Just-as-if-I-never-sinned." That might be a clever way to remember the word but it falls short because it means much more than that. Wayne Grudem defines it this way: "*An instantaneous legal act of God in which He thinks of our sins as forgiven and Christ's righteousness as belonging to us.*" We are found not guilty but we are also declared righteous. In fact, according to 2 Corinthians 5:21, we are given the righteousness of Christ so that as Romans 8:1 says,

"There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Warren Wiersbe tells the story about a man who purchased a Rolls Royce and decided to tour through Europe. As he was enjoying his drive looking at the sights, suddenly his Rolls Royce broke down with no one around who could fix it. He sent a cable to the company in England and they flew a man over who did the repairs. The man thought to himself, "*This is going to cost me a ton of money.*" He waited for a bill but it never came, so he sent a letter to the company telling what had happened, how the mechanic had fixed his car, and wondered what the charge would be. He got a letter back from the Rolls Royce Company which said,

Dear Sir, Thank you so much for your letter. You need to know that we have no record in our files that any Rolls Royce has ever broken down at any place, at any time, for any reason.

That's what justification has done in the life of the Christian. You may fail, you may break down and run yourself into a ditch, but God Almighty looks down at you and says, "*There is no record that my child has ever broken down at all.*" Your sin record is wiped away and you are credited with the perfect, eternally secure righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- ☐ **Redemption.** This term has as its background in the world of commerce, and specifically, the marketplace. There are a couple Greek words used to explain this concept. The first word means "to buy" something and the second word means to buy something *out of* the marketplace, with the idea that the object or person purchased never has to return there again. In short, to redeem means to set free by the payment of a price. This concept of redemption has deep roots in the Old Testament, with God known as Israel's Redeemer (Psalm 78:35) and all of life touched by the principle of redemption – from the obligation to redeem the first born to the annual celebration of Passover, to the concept of the kinsman-redeemer in the Book of Ruth.

In the ancient world, slaves were routinely bought and sold. The only way to be freed from slavery was for someone to pay the price and then set the slave free. This purchase price was called redemption. Redemption is the deliverance of someone or something through the payment of a price, or a ransom. Jesus saw Himself as the ransom price to purchase those who are slaves to sin in Mark 10:45:

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

He bought us, took us off the market of sin and made us His own.

Do you remember one of the cries of Christ from the Cross? Right before He died, he declared loudly in John 19:30: "***It is finished.***" This is a term from the world of commerce that literally means, "*It has been, and now stands, paid in full.*" It's like having a bill of sale to say that nothing more is owed, it's all been paid up.

One of my favorite hymns is "And Can it Be." The fourth verse captures what redemption is all about:

**Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray –
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.**

□ **Propitiation.** Propitiation is the literal meaning of the phrase translated “*sacrifice of atonement*” and has its background in the world of religion and sacrifice. The word propitiation is used in the King James Version and literally means “*to turn away wrath by the offering of a gift.*” Amazingly, this picturesque word has its root in the mercy seat as described in Leviticus 16. Once a year, on the day of Atonement, after making a sacrifice for himself, the High Priest would take the blood of a goat, and enter the Most Holy Place, where he would see the Ark of the Covenant. Inside the Ark was a little bit of manna, Aaron’s rod, and a copy of the 10 Commandments. On top of the Ark was a lid made of pure gold and two cherubim were carved into the ends facing each other. The High Priest would carefully take the blood of the goat and sprinkle it on the atonement cover.

Now, on every other day of the year, what did God see when he looked down? He saw the Ten Commandments, which were a testimony against the sins of the nation of Israel. Without the mercy seat, this box was an Ark of Judgment. On the Day of Atonement, when God looked down He saw the blood of the innocent sacrifice and not their sins.

1 John 2:2 refers to Jesus as “*the atoning sacrifice.*” When Jesus shed His blood, God had mercy on those who put their faith in Him, thus satisfying His righteous wrath. All of the accumulated sins of the entire human race were placed on Jesus and all of God the Father’s wrath was unleashed on Him. That’s why Jesus cried out on the cross, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” What ought to be a judgment seat has now through the blood of Jesus turned into a mercy seat. God is no longer angry because the punishment for sin has been placated. Don’t miss the importance of the shed blood of Jesus.

Look again at Ro 3:25:

God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood.

Hebrews 9:22 says,

Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

Over 200 years ago, William Cowper was deeply depressed and lived under the fear of God’s wrath. One day he flung himself into a chair by a window and saw a Bible there. Let’s listen to his own words: “*I opened it up and my eyes fell on Romans 3:25, which says of Christ, ‘Whom God has made a propitiation through faith in his blood.’ Then and there I realized what Christ’s blood had accomplished and I realized the effects of his atonement for me...and then and there I trusted Jesus Christ and a great burden was lifted from my soul.*” Looking back on that day, Cowper wrote a hymn several years later with these words:

There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel’s veins. And sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stain.

These wonderful word pictures are portraits of grace for the believer. We are guilty sinners in need of justification; we are slaves in need of redemption; and as those under the wrath of God we are in desperate need of propitiation.

Let’s compare and contrast these three power words using this chart:

Word Use Meaning Result

Justify Courtroom To declare righteous Acquittal

Redemption Marketplace To release from slavery Freedom

Propitiation Temple To turn away from wrath Acceptance

Are you ready to say our theme again?

God’s righteousness has made a way for us to be right with Him.

6. Righteousness is received only by faith (Ro 3:25a).

God has done everything that is needed but in order for His righteousness to be applied to our account it must be appropriated by faith. Look with me at the references to faith and belief in these verses: “***Through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe***” (22), “***through faith in his blood***” (25), “***faith in Jesus***” (26). It becomes quickly apparent that faith must have as its object the only one who can save us. Too many people today say, “*Just have faith*” as a synonym for optimism or hope. Saving faith must be centered on the Savior and His shed blood on the cross. What Jesus has done is of no benefit to you until you personally believe. That’s why Hebrews 11:6 says

And without faith it is impossible to please God...

There are at least three elements of biblical faith that can be divided into knowledge, conviction and commitment. Faith must involve the head, the heart and the will. Faith begins with *knowledge*, which is where the intellect is involved. Then it moves to the emotions where *convictions* are developed. Saving faith must then move to the will, where a *commitment* must be made.

Head (Knowledge). This refers to the factual basis of Christianity. Faith is based on knowledge and knowledge is based on biblical truth. You aren't saved by information but you can't be saved without it. Imagine that you're in a burning building and cannot find your way out. "Where is the exit?" you cry out. Through the smoke and haze comes the answer: "Go down the hallway, turn left, go down one flight of stairs, the exit is on the right." Are you saved because you know where the exit is? No, you still have to make the journey yourself. But if you don't know how to get there, or if you have some wrong information, you're going to burn to death.

Heart (Conviction). Conviction means to know something and then to be persuaded in your heart that it is true. The most common word for "**believe**" means "to have confidence in, to regard as completely reliable." The word "**Amen**," which is a Hebrew word that we use in English, literally means, "Yes, it is true." Saving faith involves saying "Amen" to the facts of the gospel. Conviction is essential because you must be personally convinced of the truth, but that alone is not enough either.

Will (Commitment). Commitment speaks to the action part of faith. We might use the word "**trust**" in the sense of "relying fully upon." The word literally means "leaning or depending." It's more than just being moved emotionally; true saving faith always ends in personal commitment; a receiving that results in a personal relationship. The night before a convicted murderer was to be executed; a man in a black suit with a Bible came to visit him. Not wanting to see a preacher, the prisoner shouted to the jailer: "I don't want to see that man! Religion never helped me before and it certainly won't do any good now!" The man in black looked deeply into the prisoner's eyes, turned and walked away silently. The next day, as they were about to execute the prisoner he was asked if he had any last requests. The prisoner said, "I do. I stayed up all night wondering who that visitor was. Who was he?" The officer paused and said, "That was the governor of the state who came to give you a pardon! Today you are not going to die just because of your crime, but because you refused to accept the pardon." Friend, you can be set free from a sentence of death and receive a full pardon – but you must reach out and take it, before it's too late.

In Revelation 3:20 Jesus offers to reinvigorate a lukewarm, lethargic church so he can have a restored relationship with those who will respond. While this passage refers to Christians, it has application to those of you who have never opened the door of your heart to Christ:

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

The three elements of faith are made clear here:

- I hear the knock—That's **knowledge**, where the *intellect* is satisfied.

I go to the door—That's conviction, where the *emotions* are engaged.

- I open the door—That's **commitment**, where the *will* makes a decision.

God's pardon is now on the table...and it does seem too good to be true. There's a sign posted on the lawn at Calvary that reads, "Salvation is free – you want it, you take it." It won't become yours until you can say, "Salvation is free – and it's for me." What are you going to do?

1. **Acknowledge** the wretchedness of your own unrighteousness.

2. **Believe** that Jesus died in your place to justify you, to redeem you, and to offer propitiation to the Father so that His righteous wrath is now satisfied.

3. **Confess** with your mouth that Jesus is your Lord. *God's righteousness has made a way for us to be right with Him...and we are justified when we receive Jesus by faith.*

As way to bring this home, I've asked Don and Lorna Grimes' children (David, Lena, Katherine and Luke) to come up and recite the "Romans Road." Listen carefully because these verses from the Book of Romans explain clearly how you can appropriate what Jesus has done for you.

Romans 3:25-31 Justice For All - 7/23/06

My wife Beth received a birthday card last month from my sister Cathy that reads,

For a Great Sister-in-Law. Now that you've been in the family a while, you've discovered our funny little secret...In fact, you're married to him!"

Real funny. I have no idea why she would say something so mean, though it could go back to the sympathy card I sent to her husband Chip right after they got engaged. I still remember that card. The front of it said, "So sorry to hear about your loss..." I can't believe that Cathy would wait more than 15 years to get back at me! She probably thinks that she now has justice...but what she doesn't know is that I will retaliate somehow.

Whenever I quote a family member in a sermon I always try to get their permission first. I sent Cathy this opening paragraph to get her OK and here's what she sent back:

Ha! Yeah, well, the four of us are planning on giving you the boot some Sunday and giving your flock a real sermon. We'll set them straight and the Real Brian will be revealed. Just kidding, glad you liked Beth's card. I'll try to be nicer to you. Not. Love, Cathy. P.S. You really do have great openings to your sermons. Always very funny and catchy. The rest of the sermons are pretty boring, but your openings are great! (I'm just kidding about the boring part)."

Now you know why I didn't like having four dumb sisters. Just multiply her comments by four and that's a picture of what I had to put up with.

In our passage in Romans today, we come face-to-face with the concept of God's justice. If the truth were known, many of us have a funny little secret as well. Do you know what it is? In our heart of hearts, a number of us have questioned, or still are questioning, God's justice. If you haven't asked these questions out loud, you may have pondered them, or perhaps you've heard others ask...

If God is so good why do I hurt so bad?

If God is fair, why is my family falling apart?

If God is so loving, why does he send so many to Hell?

If God loves me, why can't I get my locker open?

Similar questions have been voiced by the writers of Scripture...

- Habakkuk harbored some concerns about the injustices he had observed in Habakkuk 1:13:

Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?

- And Malachi summed it up for all of us when he recorded the refrain that was all too common in his day, and in ours, in Malachi 2:17:

Where is the God of justice?

One observation stands out as I compare the questions that are asked today with the questions posed by Scripture. Our problem is that we find fault with God for not doing things the way we think He should do them; while the Bible wonders why God puts up with as much as He does. Why does God tolerate the treacherous? Where is His justice? Let's take this a step further. In one sense, if God did not act in response to the atrocities of man's sinfulness, He would not be just. But, as we will learn today, we can never accuse God of injustice because everything He does is fair.

Justice is not an external system to which God tries to adhere. His justice comes out of his inner being and is based on His holiness, His truthfulness, and His righteousness. Moses put it this way in Deuteronomy 32:4:

He is the rock, His works are perfect, and all His ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is He.

God is not only just; He is also kind according to Psalm 145:17: "***The LORD is righteous in all his ways and loving toward all he has made.***" We learned last week from Romans 3:21-25 that *God's righteousness has made a way for us to be right with Him.* We ended by emphasizing the richness of three power words: justification, redemption, and propitiation. This chart serves as a good summary.

Word Use Meaning Result

Justification Courtroom To declare righteous Acquittal

Redemption Marketplace To release from slavery Freedom

Propitiation Temple To turn away from wrath Acceptance

This “salvation triangle,” from James Montgomery Boice, is a helpful picture of how these wonderful words work together. Jesus **redeems** people and offers **propitiation** to the Father, who in turn provides **justification** for those who place their faith in Jesus.

Why God Did What He Did

If our text last week focused on *what* God did for us, Romans 3:25-31 explains *why* God did what He did. Let’s look first at the second half of Ro 3:25 and Ro 3:26:

...He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

God did all this, mainly justification, redemption and propitiation in order to “**demonstrate His justice.**” He didn’t do any of it in secret. The word “demonstrate” means a “pointing out,” as with a finger. It’s as if God is pointing His finger at the cross and saying, “*There’s the proof of my justice and my grace.*” Notice that he says this twice, once in Ro 3:25 and again in Ro 3:26. He did it in the past (Ro 3:25) and He demonstrates it in the present (Ro 3:26). While it’s true that God sent Jesus to die because He loves us, this passage teaches that He sent Jesus in order to declare that He is righteous.

1. His mercy mitigates sins (Ro 3:25). Before God’s wrath was fully unleashed on the cross of Christ, in His forbearance, God held back His fury. The word “**unpunished**” means, to “pass over” or to “let go.” While God certainly judged some sin in the Old Testament, and people experienced the consequences of their sinful behavior during the Flood and when He vaporized Sodom and Gomorrah, He chose to not fully compensate every person for their unrighteousness. For centuries God had been doing what Psalm 103:10 says: “**He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.**” Acts 14:16 says: “**In the past, he let all nations go their own way.**” But God couldn’t keep postponing divine punishment because it would communicate that His glory and His righteousness are cheap and worthless.

Acts 17:30 adds, “**In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.**”

2 Peter 3:9 tells us the purpose behind His patience: “**He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.**”

PBC member Geoff Trembley sent me an email this week in response to a question I had sent him about this passage. I love his answer:

While it appears that God is accepting of sin, it is not the case. He is accepting of a perfect sacrifice that provides justification for the sinner.

Stay with me on this. If God had not punished sin and Jesus had not come to take the penalty for our sins, God would not be considered a righteous judge. In fact, He could be thought of as condoning sin if He did not condemn it and judge it. Let me be quick to say that this was not really a “problem” in God’s mind because all of this was planned out before the foundation of the world. He didn’t have to scramble to come up with a solution.

John MacArthur writes:

The real ‘problem,’ as it were, with salvation was not the matter of getting sinful men to a holy God but of getting a holy God to accept sinful men without violating His justice.

The Old Testament sacrifices were an homage to God’s honor but they did not take away sins as Hebrews 10:4 makes clear: “**...it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.**” God would not have been just had He allowed the sacrificial system to continue. Thomas Constable explains it this way:

Those who offered sacrifices in the Old Testament paid for those sins with a credit card. God accepted those sacrifices as a temporary payment. However, the bill came due later, and Jesus Christ paid that off entirely.

2. His justice justifies sinners (Ro 3:26).

In this amazing verse, God who is just, is also the one who justifies jerks like us. This is the substance of the gospel message. We could translate Ro 3:26 like this:

so as to be just and [yet] the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

This answers the great question: *How can God be just and at the same time justify sinners?* It makes sense that He would be righteous in judging sin, but how does He maintain, and even point to, His righteousness in justifying the sinner? This dilemma is solved through His plan involving the substitutionary sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross. God did not abandon His justice because His righteous wrath was poured out on Christ; and He accepted this sacrifice as full payment for sins. As a result He can forgive the fallen sinner and yet maintain His righteousness. That's the glory of the good news of the gospel. With his justice satisfied and His love unleashed, sinners are declared righteous through faith in Jesus.

For the several thousand years before the cross, God was storing up the punishment and penalty of sin and then, when His Son became the sinless sacrificial substitute, He put this punishment upon Him. **Ray Stedman** points out:

The cross says that God remains just. All the stored-up punishment amply deserved by the human race, is now poured out without restraint upon the head of Jesus on the cross.

God's justice was satisfied through the substitutionary death of the Savior. I really like how **John Piper** says it:

God saw His glory being despised by sinners—He saw His worth belittled and His name dishonored by our sins—and rather than vindicating the worth of His glory by slaying His people, He vindicated His glory by slaying His Son.

Because God is a just God, He must judge everyone who does not meet His standards for perfection. That means you and that means me because sin has to be paid for and time must be served. God's justice requires that there be payment for the penalty of sin. As the great preacher **Charles Spurgeon** once said,

Ah, sinner, if God punish not thy sin, he has ceased to be what He has always been—the severely just, the inflexibly righteous...Is it possible, then, that the sinner cannot be saved? This is the great riddle of the law, and the grand discovery of the gospel. Wonder ye heavens! Be astonished O earth! That very justice which stood in the sinner's way and prevented his being pardoned, has been by the gospel of Christ appeased; by the rich atonement offered upon Calvary, justice is satisfied, has sheathed its sword, and has no not a word to say against the pardon of the penitent.

There really is no tension between God's love and God's justice because Jesus is the fusion of divine love and divine justice. Picture a line drawn vertically -- that's God's justice. And another line drawn horizontally -- that's God's love. Where they meet is the cross. There is dissonance only if your view of love requires that God forgive sin without any payment being made.

Actually, the offer of Jesus as our sin substitute shows a greater love on God's part than simply releasing us from the consequences of sin without payment being made. To fulfill his justice, God's love was so great that He gave His Son for us. Love and justice are not two separate attributes competing with one another. God is both righteous and loving, and has given what He Himself demands. Remember that there was another way that God could have demonstrated His righteousness. He could have punished sin on the spot, but in His wisdom He showed that He could be righteous *and* merciful at the same time by punishing Jesus in our place, thereby justifying the guilty without compromising His justice. Matthew Henry says it beautifully:

Mercy and truth are so met together, righteousness and peace have so kissed each other, that it is now become not only an act of grace and mercy, but an act of righteousness, in God, to pardon the sins of penitent believers, having accepted the satisfaction that Christ by dying made to his justice for them.

The cross was at once the most horrible *and* the most beautiful example of God's wrath. It was the most just *and* the most gracious act in history. With the concentrated load of sin that Jesus carried to the Cross, God poured out His righteous wrath on Jesus. It was with this act that God's holy justice was completely satisfied. The mystery of how God can be both just and the justifier is solved only in the Savior. God is merciful toward hell-bound sinners and saves them in such a way that His justice is not compromised and He does so at the expense of His Son. Note that this plan is only activated in one's life when faith is expressed.

One writer captures this well:

The God of Christianity never claims to be fair. He goes beyond fair. The Bible teaches that He decided not to give us what we deserve – that's mercy. In addition, God decided to give us exactly what we don't deserve – we call that grace.

Albert Midlane penned this reality in a poem:

**God could not pass the sinner by,
His sin demands that he must die;
But in the cross of Christ we see**

How God can save, yet righteous be.

How to Respond to What God Has Done

Based upon these amazing truths that God's mercy mitigates our sins and that His justice justifies sinners, we have a response to make. Using diatribes again, in which Paul asks and answers various questions, Romans 3:27-31 gives us four implications that come from these two truths. Actually, most of the rest of the Book of Romans covers the deductions or implications of justification by faith. This is such an important doctrinal truth that we must first understand it and then embrace all of its implications.

1. Pride has no place (Ro 3:27).

Look with me at Ro 3:27:

Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith.

Boasting is the outward form of the inner condition of pride. For the Christian, arrogance is excluded, and boasting is banished because God has done it all. The word "excluded" was used to shut someone outside the door of a tower. Boasting is to not even enter the character of the Christian. It's all about Him! We are saved by His worth, by His work and by His word.

In Psalm 101:5, God says

...Whoever has haughty eyes and a proud heart, him will I not endure.

Pride is the worst transgression of all for it was Satan's sin in Isaiah 14:13-14:

I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.

Friends, we are most like Satan when we are arrogant, boastful and proud. Those who boast are busted because no one gets the gift of grace because they deserve it. If we received what we deserved we'd be in a heap of trouble. I like the reminder in 1 Corinthians 1:31: ***Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.***

I should add that we are allowed to boast in one area according to 2 Corinthians 11:30:

If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.

One night this week I took our two youngest daughters Becca and Megan for a bike ride. Somehow our bikes ended up at Casey's and we all got a treat. Instead of jumping back on our bikes and trying to juggle our snacks while we rode home, we decided to sit on the sidewalk outside the store. In order to pass the time I suggested that we have a contest to see how many cars of a certain color would drive by. Megan chose red, Becca chose tan and I picked white. The first one to get to ten would be declared the winner. It was a pretty close race and when one of us won, a victory dance ensued and self-congratulation pierced the air. As I thought about that, the winner of this arbitrary contest really did nothing to win. It had everything to do with what cars drove by Casey's. Likewise, it's absurd for us to be arrogant about our own salvation because we had nothing to do with it.

2. Faith gains God's favor (Ro 3:28).

As a great teacher, Paul knows the importance of repetition so he says again in Ro 3:28:

For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

He's really going back to Ro 3:24 to establish that salvation is gift to be received, not a paycheck to be earned. Working calls attention to the worker while faith calls attention to the faithful One. We are declared righteous by faith, and even our faith is a gift from God. Notice that the word "faith" is used five times in these five verses. Faith sees the invisible, believes the incredible and receives the impossible.

I've never been there but I'm told that the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem has a very small entrance. In fact, it's so small that you have to duck down low to get inside. They deliberately designed it that way because several centuries ago local big shots liked to ride their horses right into the sanctuary. By lowering the entrance, they had to dismount before entering. If we want to get to heaven we must get off our high horses. Once we're saved, great gratitude must be our attitude, not big boasting.

I read this week that every revival within the last 500 years has been directly related to people humbly embracing the doctrine of justification by faith. It can literally transform each of us and this church. I talked to a woman last week who said with tears in her eyes, "Now I know that I'm saved." John Bunyan, author of "Pilgrim's Progress," wrote these words as if God were speaking after studying Romans 3:

Sinner, you think that because of your sins and your infirmities that I cannot save your soul. But behold, My Son is by Me and upon Him I look, not upon you, and I will deal with you as I am pleased with Him.

Here's the gospel message in three simple sentences:

- What God demands, we don't have.*
- What we don't have, Jesus has provided.*
- What Jesus has provided, we receive by faith.*

3. Everyone can experience salvation (Ro 3:29-30). Once again, Paul reiterates that salvation is not the exclusive right of one group of people as he puts an end to narrow nationalism in Ro 3:29-30:

Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.

Paul has already made this point in Romans 1:16 when he said that the gospel is the power of God for salvation to ***“everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”*** God created everyone and Christ died for everyone.

Christianity *is* exclusive because Jesus is the only way to heaven. Unfortunately fewer and fewer people believe this today, including some pastors. In a recent interview in *Time* magazine (7/10/06), the new leader of a large denomination (which I will not name publicly) was asked for her views on a number of topics. When asked if belief in Jesus is the only way to heaven, she responded:

We who practice the Christian tradition understand him as our vehicle to the divine. But for us to assume that God could not act in other ways is, I think, to put God in an awfully small box.

The way to heaven is narrow the last time I checked!

The Jewish people were in a special covenant with God but they also had a sacred commission to share these blessings with gentiles. As God first told Abraham in Genesis 12:3: ***“...all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”*** Instead of considering themselves as belonging to God, many Jews virtually considered God as only belonging to them. They were ethnically exclusive and spiritually separatistic.

More than 30 years ago, Campus Crusade for Christ launched the “I Found It” campaign on college campuses that eventually spread to more than 100 countries. Many Jewish groups were offended by this so they bought billboards that said, “We Never Lost It.” Actually, we've all lost it and the only way to find it is by putting our faith and trust in Christ, no matter what our religious or denominational background is. That's why we support as many missionaries as we do and why we partner with Rebecca Cox as she serves Christ in Spain. The gospel message is to go out around the globe, not just in our country.

I like how James Montgomery Boice applies this truth:

Who may come? *Everybody.*

How may I come? *Just as you are.*

When may I come? *At any time, but don't delay.*

4. The Law of God should drive us to the Lamb of God(Ro 3:31).

Paul anticipates in Ro 3:31 that some might think that he has no place for the law:

Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.

Paul quickly replies that the Law is not outlawed or done away with. One Greek scholar said that the word “nullify” is pictured by the phrases “pull the teeth out” or “declaw.” The law has not been declawed. In fact, the sense is *“May it never be! A thousand times no!”* As we established a couple weeks ago, the law serves as a mirror to display our need of grace. The Law is not a ladder by which we climb to God to earn His acceptance. Instead, it's like an X-ray to expose the extent of our sin and guilt, so we see our need for mercy. Paul will come back to this theme in chapters 6 and 7 so I'll just summarize the good aspects of God's law briefly. Christianity is meant to be neither legalistic nor lawless. Paul says that the Law must be upheld because it...

- Reveals the holy character of God (Nehemiah 9:3)
- Exposes the depravity of people (Romans 7:7)

- Prepares us for the gospel (Galatians 3:24)
- Shows us that Jesus fulfilled all the requirements (Matthew 5:17)
- Grows within us a love for the Law (Psalm 119:97)
- Guides us as believers today (Romans 8:1-4)

Do vs. Done

As we come to the end of Romans 3, we're finishing what is at the heart of the Bible. As we've established, there really is no secret to salvation. It all boils down to this...

Am I going to trust my work or God's work?

Am I going to focus on my failures or will I put my faith in the Faithful One?

Am I going to continue to "Do" or will I rest in what has been "Done"?

Chuck Dunning gave me a book a couple weeks ago called "The Speaker's Treasury of Anecdotes," published in 1948. I think he realized I needed some help not just with my introductions but also with my conclusions! As I thumbed through it this week, I came across a story about a pastor who was trying to get one of his members to come back to church:

"Well, George, how is it that you have not been to church lately?" "Ain't got no Sunday trousers," replied George.

The pastor thought quickly and said, *"I have an extra pair I'll send you."*

The trousers arrived a few days later and George came to church three Sundays in a row. But then George stopped coming again. About a month later the pastor met his parishioner again and reminded him that he was missed at church. George responded,

Look here, parson, I like for a man to speak plain. You're thinking about them trousers. I come to church three Sundays, and if you don't think I've earned them, tell me how many more Sunday's it'll take, and I'll either come back to church or send them back to you.

I've put two chairs here on the floor. One is labeled "Do" and the other chair has the word "Done" on it. These two chairs represent the two kinds of religion in the world. Every religion is either a "Do" religion or a "Done" religion. The "Do" people think they have to earn a pair of trousers, or forgiveness, or heaven by performing prayers, going to church, giving money, or by following the 10 Commandments. Friends, every religion other than Christianity is a "Do" religion.

Those who are seated in the "Done" chair recognize that Jesus did it all. It is finished. The debt has been paid. They've stopped trying and started trusting. Instead of working for the gift they've simply received it.

Here's my closing question. What chair are you in? If you're in the "Do" chair, are you ready to get up right now and come down here and sit in the "Done" chair? We're going to close our service with a couple more songs. While we're singing, I want to invite you to come and sit down in the "Done" chair if you're ready to receive what Jesus has done for you. Let this be your response to God's offer of redemption.