

ROMANS 1:17-20 There is No Excuse Before a Holy God

Romans 1:17-20 For in it *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS *man* SHALL LIVE BY FAITH." For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

Last week we ended with verse 16 where Paul declares that he is not ashamed of the Gospel. William Barclay in his commentary on Romans makes the statement: "It is amazing to think of the background of that statement. Paul has been imprisoned in Philippi, chased out of Thessalonica, smuggled out of Berea, laughed at in Athens and in Corinth his message was foolishness to the Greeks and a stumbling block to the Jews. Out of that background he declared that he was proud of the gospel. There was something in the gospel which made Paul triumphantly victorious over all that men could do to him."

Paul understood the power of the gospel. Not just the power of God in the lives of His people to strengthen them in their walk with the Lord, as important as that is, but more than that, the power to actually make us alive in Christ where prior to this life, according to Eph 2:1, "you were dead in your transgressions and sins..."

The power of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit doesn't theoretically provide a way to God or theoretically forgive us of the penalty of our sin, it actually accomplishes it. The power is in the reality that God secures salvation for all who believe in Him alone. This is what we see in Colossian's.

Col 2:13-15 "When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having

disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."

The powers and authorities of Satan result in only one thing. Death. Satan and sin work hand in hand. Sin will only bring condemnation. It will destroy, not only the life of a person in this world, but also in the world to come as men are separated from their Creator forever.

For the Christian, the power of Satan has been disarmed, because the Creator of this creature, known as Satan, has made it sure. Your salvation in Christ is a reality with power, not wishful thinking in timidity.

How could Paul be ashamed of that? He couldn't. His confidence didn't come from those around him who scoffed, or who tried to bring him low, or who tried to persuade others that he was a heretic, as the Jews continually did; no his confidence came from the Almighty God who would never disappoint him or leave Him or give him reason to faint.

He was proud to be a servant with a message of real hope in the power of God Himself. This gospel came from God and it was for mankind.

Rom 1:17 "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." [Hab. 2:4]

When we think of the righteousness of God all sorts of different thoughts may come to mind. Some might think of a God who has a long list on mankind and whenever people don't walk according to that list He stands ready to hit them with a baseball bat.

Others might view the righteous God as one who is unfair with mankind and isn't able to cut men a little slack. 'After all, we're just human.'

But when the scriptures speak of the righteousness of God it doesn't simply speak of the way God acts toward men, it speaks of the very nature of God who has no unrighteousness whatsoever.

To say that God is righteous is to say that He is perfect, He is holy, without any flaw, and that everything He does comes from this nature which can do no wrong.

People in this world, including some Christians, have a tendency to question God about His actions. But in reality what they are

questioning is His nature and His Holy character. God cannot act apart from who He is. This righteousness or perfection of God has been revealed, according to verse 17.

The Greek word for revealed is actually in, what is referred to as the "present imperative tense." That's just a fancy way of saying that that which is revealed is not just in the past, or revealed once and for all, but is continually being revealed.

So the righteousness of God is continually being revealed as we see in the past, now in the present, and also in the future. But, as a righteous God, He must be the One who sets the standard. He is the only standard. And so as He reveals Himself, He shows us that He is the righteous One on whom we must place our faith if we are to have communion with Him today and forever more.

And as Paul explains this in verse 17 he quotes an O.T. verse found in Hab.2:4 where the end of that verse says, but the righteous will live by his faith --."

There's that word righteous again which this time refers not to God but to people. This brings up another aspect of what it means to be righteous. Unfortunately, some have confused what it is to be righteous in the eyes of God, with acting righteous in the eyes of men, so as to lift ourselves up.

The righteousness that Paul speaks of here has nothing to do with any righteousness or holiness in ourselves that can make us right before God or put us in the clear as it involves our guilt before a holy God, but rather a righteousness, outside of ourselves, which is the solution to our guilt before God.

Paul touches on this in this letter to the Romans as he quotes Psa.14:1 in Rom 3:10 "As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one;"

Since God is perfect only a perfect righteousness from God will do to solve our sin problem. The problem is men want their own solution. God says, 'your only solution is Me, but you must transfer any faith you have in yourselves and place that trust on Me and believe what I say about your sinful condition is true and that only My solution is true.'

That takes faith. And only the righteous man will live by faith. That righteous man spoken of in Rom.1:17 is one who has relinquished his way and embraced the Way and the Truth and the life: Jesus Christ Himself.

Now often times this part of verse 17 is quoted in a way to encourage Christians to live by faith on a daily basis. And of course that can't be argued, we must live by faith in God daily. But the intent of this verse goes back to a more basic proposition.

The more literal translation of the Greek is, "But he who is righteous by faith shall live."

And so, in Paul's own way, what he is saying is that there is no life unless you totally trust in a righteous God by faith, who then declares you righteous because of the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ placed to your account, who stood in your place as a sinless sacrifice, and paid your debt in full on the cross. No faith in Christ, no life. Faith in Christ, you will live forever in His presence.

God's righteousness and salvation go hand in hand as we see in Isa 46:13 "I am bringing my righteousness near, it is not far away; and my salvation will not be delayed....."

If we have placed our faith in Christ, which is to place our faith in His righteousness, we have His salvation. It will not be delayed. And so in this verse we see the grace and mercy of God being extended to all who would believe.

This is where Paul begins to build on the idea of justification by faith. Once again William Barclay puts it very succinctly when he speaks of this idea of justification.

He says, "We must be quite clear that the word justify, used in this sense, has a different meaning from its ordinary English meaning. If we justify ourselves, we produce reasons to prove that we were right; if someone justifies us, he produces reasons to prove that we acted in the right way. But all verbs in Greek which end in {oo-o} do not mean to prove or to make a person or thing to be something; they always mean to treat, or account or reckon a person as something."

..... If God justifies a sinner, it does not mean that He finds reasons to prove that he was right--far from it. It does mean that

God treats the sinner as if he had not been a sinner at all. Instead of treating him as a criminal to be obliterated, God treats him as a child to be loved. That is what justification means. It means that God reckons us not as His enemies but as His friends..... That is the very essence of the gospel."

And it's this gospel which is offered to the world. But there is a sobering reality and truth which God doesn't want us to forget. Because in considering this truth it helps us to appreciate so great a salvation which is a free gift to all who would believe.

Rom 1:18 "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness,"

Now, here again we must be careful not to place some human characteristic on God when it comes to His wrath. People will define wrath in terms of a vengeful punishment because of an anger in ourselves. And though God is angry with sin He is not some sort of ogre who is out of control and who feels the only way He can get even is to beat someone up; and in that way He gets some sort of sick delight.

His wrath is the perfect outworking of His righteousness, it is not some cosmic blotch on His character, as the world would stereotype Him. In His perfect justice He only does what must be done as people rebel against Him. Not to deal with sin in a righteous way would show that He is not a holy God at all.

Arthur W. Pink rightly says in his book, "Gleanings in the Godhead", "Indifference to sin is a moral blemish, and he who does not hate it is a moral leper. How could He who is the sum of all excellency look with equal satisfaction upon virtue and vice, wisdom and folly? How could He who is infinitely holy disregard sin and refuse to manifest His 'severity' toward it?"

The world has believed the lie that somehow God shouldn't get so upset with mere humans because we don't happen to be perfect. 'I mean what's the big deal if we happen to have a vice here or there or don't come up to His holy standards? Surely, He's big enough to look the other way. It can't be any skin off of His nose. What's the big deal God?'

That's the world's attitude. But, you know, it seems that attitude has infiltrated the Body of Christ.

'What's the big deal God? I'm not perfect, I'm doing my best, just cut me some slack and quit reminding me that, just because You are "perfect holiness", that you want me to be holy as well.'

And in a sense it's true that we may be doing our best, and we aren't perfect, but what may be our best in the flesh is not what God has in mind for us in the power of the Spirit.

But, praise God we have the Spirit who enables us to seek Him and love Him and obey Him, to His honor and glory. Make no mistake about it, the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

But have you ever thought, 'God why do you let those who hate You get away with their sin?' God's righteousness is perfect, His justice is perfect, and yes even His wrath is perfect. And there are none who will ultimately escape the wrath of God who has extended His grace in His Son Jesus Christ.

But as we look at a world that seems to be out of control with people continually blaspheming God we can run the risk, as Christians, of asking that question amiss, thinking that now that we know Christ as Lord and Savior, the rest of the world should not get away with their sin. Our holy God should reveal His wrath sooner than later on these rebels.

Interestingly enough Christ's very disciples felt this way on at least one occasion.

Luke 9:52-56 and He sent messengers on ahead of Him, and they went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make arrangements for Him. But they did not receive Him, because He was traveling toward Jerusalem. When His disciples James and John saw *this*, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" But He turned and rebuked them, *and said, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of;* for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." And they went on to another village.

The problem with that attitude is that it forgets that we too were part of that crowd and deserved His wrath. Remember what Paul said to the Ephesians?

Ephesians 2:1-3^{NAU} And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this

world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

The people described in these verses deserved nothing but the wrath of God because as Paul says, they were by nature children of wrath. Later in this same letter Paul drives home his point about who deserves the wrath of God as he reiterates that those who live in the lusts of their flesh will experience God's wrath.

Ephesians 5:5-6 For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

The very people Paul addresses as saints in the first verse of Ephesians 1 are the very people whom he describes as once being dead in their trespasses and sins as they walked as sons of disobedience deserving God's wrath. And yet these same people are then given a gift that is beyond measure.

Ephesians 2:4-9 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Here's the point. It's very easy, once we have been given life in Christ, and are now inside the kingdom of God, to view the world as in need of God's wrath when in fact that's what we deserved. Instead of simply viewing the world as the enemy, (which on one level it is), we need to view people as those in need of a Savior and reach out to the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Those who reject Christ, who rebel against a holy God will face their Creator. Many will experience the wrath of God in this life for their rebellion, but all will taste the full force of His wrath forever if they have not bowed their knee to the Savior.

But what a sad commentary on the condition of man, not wanting to come into conformity with the desires of God, who created us so that we might have fellowship with Him, and yet men still push Him away as we all did outside of Christ.

But also, what a sobering word from God who shows us that His hatred for sin is real and He does not look the other way. Men may use all sorts of excuses for their sin but God doesn't buy them.

In fact God tells us that even those who think they've got some pretty good excuses for rebelling against Him don't have a leg to stand on. 'But, God I didn't have the chance to know You because You were so hard to find, I can't see You.'

Rom 1:19 "... since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.

The NAS puts it, Rom.1:19-20 "because that which is known about God is evident within them. 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."

Now for anyone who has an excuse, God has made it plain that there are no excuses. What Paul is saying here is that despite the fact that the word of God reveals God and the salvation we may have in Christ, the very creation of God is more than sufficient to reveal a Supreme Creator to whom all men are held accountable.

In Theological circles these two types of revelation are known as General revelation, which is seen in God's creation, and Special revelation, which is seen in God speaking to men through His word and finding its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ; the Word become flesh.

General revelation screams of the Designer of a universe. And this information alone is sufficient to men to speak to their hearts that God is their Creator.

The NIV and the KJV use the phrase in verse 19, "that which may be known of God." The Greek word is gnostos and it infers that which is well known. And so it's not as though the possibility of knowing God exists, but rather men do in fact know that God exists, based on just this one aspect of creation as God has hard-

wired that understanding into every person.

But, as verse 18 tells us, men have suppressed this truth and deny the truth willfully. But that doesn't negate what men really know to be true deep down. Atheists will tell you that they categorically deny any God-consciousness within them because they believe that God doesn't exist.

They don't come to that conclusion because of any evidence around them like creation, but in spite of the evidence, they choose to reject God. It's not a perceptual problem, it's a heart problem with a preconceived idea of the world which, in their case, doesn't include God.

Josh McDowell in his book, "More Evidence that Demands a Verdict", speaks of a group of students who gave his first book to a professor, who was also the head of the history department of a large well-known university.

They asked him to read "Evidence that demands a Verdict" and give them his opinion. Several months later one of the students returned to his office to inquire about his progress. The professor replied that he had finished the book. He continued that "it contained some of the most persuasive arguments that he had read and didn't know how anyone could refute them." At this point he added, "However, I do not accept Mr. McDowell's conclusions."

The student, slightly baffled, asked Why? The head of the history department answered, "Because of my world view!" His final rejection was not because of the evidence but in spite of the evidence."

There's a joke which Josh McDowell heard John Montgomery tell and he uses it to illustrate such a viewpoint of someone who's already made up their mind despite what the facts say.

"Once upon a time there was a man who thought he was dead. His concerned wife and friends sent him to the friendly neighborhood psychiatrist. The Psychiatrist determined to cure him by convincing him of one fact that contradicted his belief that he was dead. The Psychiatrist decided to use the simple truth that dead men do not bleed.

He put his patient to work reading medical texts, observing autopsies, etc. After weeks of effort, the patient finally said, 'All

right, all right! You've convinced me. Dead men do not bleed.'
Whereupon the psychiatrist stuck him in the arm with a needle, and the blood flowed. The man looked down with a contorted, ashen face and cried: 'Good Lord! Dead men bleed after all!'"

Montgomery comments: "This parable illustrates that if you hold unsound presuppositions with sufficient tenacity, facts will make no difference at all, and you will be able to create a world of your own, totally unrelated to reality and totally incapable of being touched by reality. The man in the parable not only thought he was dead, but in a very real sense, he was dead because facts no longer meant anything to him."

This is the condition of the world outside of Christ. It shouldn't surprise us when someone rejects the special revelation of the Holy Spirit inspired written word of God, which details how Jesus Christ came into this world to die for sinners, and who then rose bodily from the dead so that we might have life, when they can't even come to grips with the evidence they live on; planet earth, the creation of Almighty God.

It is a spiritual problem. Our Lord Jesus tells us in Mat 13:15 "For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.'

"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness."

God doesn't wink at sin, but neither does He leave us without hope. "The gospel (of Jesus Christ), it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes."

"The righteous man, by faith, shall live!"

The apostle Peter understood how easy it is to become discouraged in a world where men continue to reject God, but he also understood that God will always be faithful to Himself and His promises.

2Pe 3:9-13 "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. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought [we] to be? [We] ought to live holy and godly lives as [we] look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness."

That is where we will dwell forever with our God and Creator. And the message we have for the world is that they too can glorify God by coming to Him by faith and receiving His righteousness and salvation in Christ.

It's God who turns the heart and He has given us the privilege to share the gospel in this world. There is no excuse for men to reject God; there is every reason to come to Him by faith.

Let's pray for our community that God would be pleased to let His gospel go forth and that all people everywhere would embrace Christ as we are faithful to go and represent Him in His power and might.