

THE LETTER THAT CHANGED THE WORLD - The Biblical Theology of Romans - Part five

Sunday, October 21st, 2018 - 6:00 p.m. - Teaching #2080

Pastor Don Horban - Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

Last week we examined some of Paul's key points on God's *general revelation* to all mankind:

- a) ***God has revealed Himself to all people - 1:19-20*** - "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. [20] For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So ***they are without excuse.***" Those words, "***without excuse***" must be allowed their full meaning. Paul means these people will not be able to declare God's judgment ***unfair*** or ***biased*** or ***poorly thought through.***
- b) ***All people are held accountable for what they do with the revelation they have received - 1:18, 20*** - "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth....1:20...." For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse."
- c) ***In rejecting God, mankind replaces Him with idols - 1:23*** - "...and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles." Thus, mankind's religions are not, as is usually assumed, attempts to ***reach*** the true God. They are attempts to ***avoid*** Him. Sinful hearts forever ***exchange*** the true God for that which is infinitely less.
- d) ***God has given mankind over to judgement - 1:24-28*** - "Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, [25] because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. [26] For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; [27] and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. [28] And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done."

This is not God's ***final*** judgment on sin. It is His ***present*** form of judgment on human wickedness. Future ***final*** judgment is being ***stored up*** for those who are unrepentant (2:5).

Today we will study ***Romans 2:1-11*** - "Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. [2] We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who do such things. [3] Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? [4] Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? [5] But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. [6] He will render to each one according to his works: [7] to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; [8] but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. [9] There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, [10] but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. [11] For God shows no partiality."

These verses continue the theme of mankind's responsibility when faced with the **universal general revelation** of God. Paul is still explaining his thesis statement in **Romans 1:16** - "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." The idea here is **everyone** needs the gospel. Both the **religious Jews** and the **pagan Greeks** stand equally in need of the power of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul then began proving this statement. He's been dealing with the guilt of the Greeks - those who did not have the law of God (**1:18-31**). Paul says they are still guilty before God. Even though they didn't have Bibles and laws they **did** have revelation from God. God's might and power and greatness have been revealed in the world of creation around them. That was the focus of last week's study.

But there is another dimension to the universal general revelation from God. While Paul has already touched on it in **1:18**, he will now deal with the general revelation of God's **moral nature** in the giving of **conscience**. All people, however religious or atheistic, however informed or ignorant, possess a sense of **moral standards**. Of course, these will vary a great deal from person to person and culture to culture, but that's not Paul's point at all. He's not dealing at all with whether or not these standards are accurate or legalistic or mistaken. He simply wants to point out that **all** people **possess** an inward moral compass and **all** people **violate** it. That is the subject in today's text.

- 1) **THERE ARE THREE WAYS PEOPLE STAND CONDEMNED UNDER GOD'S GENERAL INTERNAL MORAL REVELATION - Romans 1:32-2:1** - "Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them. [2:1] Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things."

These are very carefully argued verses. Paul is still addressing the issue of **all** people needing the power of the gospel. And he's still thinking particularly about the Greeks - people who haven't been the recipients of God's special revelation in the Law - the Bible. There are people all over the globe who have little or no knowledge of salvation through Christ Jesus. They have never heard the gospel. They've never seen a Bible in their own language. What about them? Are they **guilty** before God or are they **innocent**? That's the issue introduced in these two verses.

In keeping with the theme of the preceding verses Paul says all people have an innate sense of the righteous decree of God. He's not talking about the written law. He is talking about all people having an **awareness** - an **instinct** - of what is basically civil and proper and what is not. The sins listed in **1:22-31** are, says Paul, **obviously** off the mark of righteousness. These are not **religious** sins in the strictest sense. You don't have to aspire to sainthood to be aware of the wrongness of these things. God has planted certain **decrees** (**1:32**) within the human heart.

But there's a problem. Paul says people with no special revelation from God still violate these inward decrees. They betray themselves in **three ways**:

First, they do these wicked things. They don't do them all the time. And they probably don't do **all** of them. But bit by bit and repeatedly they break the standards of their own conscience.

Second, they give approval to those who break these inward decrees - "...they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them" (**1:32b**). Please stop and ponder that fact that God considers me **judgable** for not abhorring sinful actions in others. This is **not** the same thing as hating **sinner**s. But we must never **adjust** to the things God hates. Think this through. God fully expects me to hate all sin just as much as He does.

And **third, these people judge others for doing the very things they themselves have done - Romans 2:1 - "Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things."** In this point Paul sees the clearest **proof** that we all **know** these basic righteous decrees inwardly. We give ourselves away by the fact that we pass judgment on the people who do these same things to us. We thereby **prove** we think these things are sinful. And yet we **do** them (at least sometimes) ourselves.

2) **GOD'S JUDGMENT ON THOSE WITHOUT THE COMPLETE, SPECIAL REVELATION OF THE TESTIMONY OF THE GOSPEL AND THE SCRIPTURES, WHILE BEYOND OUR COMPLETE UNDERSTANDING, IS COMPLETELY JUST**

Romans 2:1-3 - "Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. [2] We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who do such things. [3] Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God?"

Every time we pass any kind of moral judgment on anyone anywhere we **fingerprint** ourselves as deeply moral beings. Thus, whenever we **break** any of those same moral pronouncements ourselves, we show ourselves to be sinners. And more, we prove ourselves to be **aware** of our sin. This is Paul's main point in these verses. Paul says we are **"inexcusable"** sinners (2:1).

Sometimes people wonder how fair it is of God to judge people who have never heard - or even had a **chance** to hear - of Jesus Christ? But this argument, however sincerely offered, misses Paul's point entirely. These people aren't judged for rejecting Christ. These people are not judged for something they didn't know.

Rather, Paul says they are inexcusable when judged because God will judge them for what they **do** know, not what they **don't**. Judgment, in all sorts of varying degrees which we can't fully grasp right now, will be meted out according to the revelation one possessed. In a nutshell, Paul describes God's judgment as always being done **"rightly"**(2:2).

3) **PAUL TELLS US WHY MANY SINNERS FAIL TO TAKE GOD'S JUDGMENT WARNINGS SERIOUSLY - Romans 2:4-5 - "Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? [5] But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed."**

One of the reasons people stall repentance is the apparent absence of God's judgment on sin in this present age. People see things continuing, for the most part, the way they always have. Sinners can get by their whole lives prospering from their wickedness. Even the Psalmist David wrestled with the apparent **"fatness"** of the wicked in this age (**Psalm 73**). This can be deeply troubling to the child of God.

Peter cautioned sinners in the same fashion as Paul - **2 Peter 3:3-4 - "...knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. [4] They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation."** The consistency and regularity of life will cause sinners to actually **"scoff"** at the idea that God will one day bring final judgment upon them.

Paul says what God meant for their **good** in the revelation in nature and conscience was being turned to their **destruction** - **Romans 2:5** - **“But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.”** Just as Christ speaks of laying up **“treasure”** in heaven, Paul speaks of these sinners **“storing up wrath”** at God's final judgment.

This is the clear Biblical answer to the frequently posed question - “Where is God while our world is filled with so much violence and corruption. You Christians speak of a good and loving God. What is He **doing** while all this is going on?” Paul gives a very simple but unpopular answer to that question. “He is **storing up wrath for the day of wrath.**” That's what God is doing.

- 4) **ARE WE SAVED BY GRACE OR BY WORKS? - Romans 2:6-11** - **“He will render to each one according to his works: [7] to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; [8] but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. [9] There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, [10] but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. [11] For God shows no partiality.”**

These words do not describe salvation by works. Rather, keeping the context in mind, Paul addresses both Jews and Greeks in this summary statement. He is not talking about how people are **saved** at this point. He's talking about how they're **judged** - especially those who have not had exposure to the gospel.

For those who have had no presentation of the gospel it will not be enough just to judge the moral failings of **others**. For the Jew, with all the religious training and teaching in the law of God, it will not be enough merely to **profess** orthodox theology. Each will be judged fairly and righteously. Each stands in need of more than the efforts of his or her own will-power. This will lead Paul into a presentation of the power of the gospel later on in this letter.