

## “God’s Righteousness” Romans 1:1 – 2:16

At the time Paul wrote Romans, he was the houseguest of a man named Gaius, a wealthy citizen of the Grecian city of Corinth. He was at least 1,500 miles from Rome and there were no railways or stage lines, only intermittent shipping facilities. But God provided the postman (actually a post woman) of the moment in the form of a woman named Phoebe. Roy Laurin writes in his commentary on Romans:

“Phoebe was a widow of considerable wealth who served as a deaconess in the Christian church at Cenchrea some nine miles from Corinth. She was on her way to Rome on business and into her hands was entrusted this important document. Did Phoebe, the post woman, know the importance of this document? Probably not, but God knew her trustworthiness. It is a tribute to womanhood that so important a document and so sacred a trust should have been put into female hands upon such a perilous journey.”

Why bring that up? Because it’s important that we remember that the New Testament church may have had male apostles leading out in church planting and evangelism, but it was

never a “Lone Ranger” effort. Women have always played a vital part in the church just as they did in supporting Jesus’ ministry.

Paul began by introducing himself in verse 1. “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ (we know he’s speaking of a bondservant – someone bought with a price), called to be an apostle (notice he’s a servant first, then apostle – many want the high place before first taking the low – they would rather serve the communion cup than give a cup of cold water in Jesus’ name) . . . he goes on to say, “separated unto the gospel of God.” (To be separated does not mean isolated. The need is not for isolation but insulation. Remember Jesus prayed in John 17:15 “I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.” We don’t remove ourselves from the arena of life, but the Holy Spirit insulates us so that we can stand against the disastrous and weakening effect of evil influences around us.)

The gospel of God was this – that in Jesus Christ, who “was declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead” (vs.4), is the Good News that salvation and righteousness from God are available to human beings and that it is “by faith from first to last.” The good news about salvation is that it does not depend on **what we do** to earn it, but comes as **a gift** that can only be received by faith. Later in Romans Paul is

going to examine each theme introduced here and explain the astounding nature of “salvation” and how it is that both eternal life and righteousness are involved. And he’ll help us understand the true nature of faith. But first of all, Paul wanted to make sure we fully understood **why** we need this salvation.

Have you ever been in church, listening to the sermon and found your mind wandering? A story is told of Calvin Coolidge who attended church alone one Sunday because his wife was ill. When he returned home, he went up to her room to see how she was feeling. Mrs. Coolidge asked if he had enjoyed the sermon and he gave a weak, “yes.” “What was it about?” she asked. “Sin,” he replied. “What did the minister say?” “I think he was against it.”

F. B. Meyer says, “Sin is dark, dangerous and damnable.” Indeed, we need salvation because sin is grim. Without salvation we have no spiritual life. Without it, we have no righteousness. Without it, we stand guilty and condemned before a holy God. There is no hope for any person aside from salvation by faith that God offers us in Jesus!

Paul had the gospel message to give both Jew and Gentile that can bring life to the lost. As fellow Christians, we are just as

obligated to share the good news of salvation with everyone we possibly can.

Paul was a man of purpose: 1) he wanted to preach in Rome, 2) he wanted to unselfishly share spiritual gifts and encourage the faithful, and 3) he wanted to win souls more than anything else. He was not ashamed of the gospel. Are you? Have you honestly asked yourself that question lately? If we're not, then why are we so reluctant to speak up?

Truthfully, most of us could say we're not ashamed of Jesus or the cross, but we're ashamed at our lack of preparedness in our witness. We're going to help you with that in this study of Romans. Lesson 10 will focus on that. Every Christian must equip himself to share the good news.

To the Jew the gospel was a stumbling block because they were proud; to the Greeks, the gospel was foolishness because they were wise; to the Romans, it was weakness because Rome was the epitome of power. But the gospel is a power that masters the proud, the wise, and the powerful.

Paul goes on in chapter 1, verses 18-32 to really hit home where we live today. Do you agree with God that the world is guilty of sin? Hopefully guilt will lead to repentance. But how does the world handle guilt?

1. Sometimes denial – they insist that everyone has a right to “do his own ` thing” – that there are no absolute moral standards binding on society.

Personally, I don't think those who say it really believe it. Deep down, we know right from wrong. Remember Robert Fulghum said, “Everything I really need to know I learned in kindergarten.”

Share – play fair – don't hit people – put things back where you found them – clean up your own mess – don't take things that aren't yours – say you're sorry when you hurt somebody . . . he had more, but you get the idea. There **is** a moral standard and denying it doesn't make it go away.

2. Another approach to guilt is to explain it away – we look back to our childhood, blame our parents or society's conditions rather than individual choice. Denying personal responsibility is a popular way to attempt to rid ourselves of guilt.
3. Some establish a system of “do's and don'ts” which we can live up to. If we still feel guilty, we compare ourselves with others who don't live up to our high standards and remind ourselves how much better we

are than others in society. There's a little poem that goes:

"I have a little religious list  
that goes in and out with me,  
And everything I don't or do  
I hope that God will see."

Does that sound like the Pharisees of Jesus' day? More than we'd like to admit, we still have modern-day Pharisees. We'll be learning more about the legalists in other lessons.

4. And, of course, there is always the approach just to enjoy sin without guilt. It's easier than you might think to sear your conscience against the prodding of the Holy Spirit until we're no longer troubled by guilt. You remember the little saying:

"Sow a thought, reap an act.  
Sow an act, reap a habit.  
Sow a habit, reap your character.  
Sow your character, reap your destiny."

The habits of sin are powerful. Praise God – He can break them!!

God is far more interested in speaking to us of forgiveness than of guilt though. But to accept and appreciate God's forgiveness, we have to acknowledge the fact of sin and the fact of God's wrath to deal with it.

Jesus did not come to save "society" . . . He came to save sinners. Sins are an individual transgression against a personal God. It's a delusion of Satan to believe that God grades on the curve (I'm better than that person . . . that being more good than bad will qualify you for heaven).

You've heard people say, "What about the heathen in Africa?" (or wherever) "What about those who never hear of Jesus?" And the answer is plain in verse 20 . . . creation is God's testimony to Himself that He exists; the majesty of the universe, the birth of a baby, the human body itself, the astounding diversity of animal and plant life that exists, the perfection of a rose. Men are without excuse for not believing in Him, the Creator!

Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 3:11 "He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end." Mankind is ever searching for that "something that is missing from their life." It's the hole in the heart that only

God can fill. He makes Himself known every day in every way if only we'll open our eyes. 1 Chronicles 28:9 "If you seek him, he will be found by you . . ."

But sadly, how have so many responded? They neither glorified Him nor gave thanks to Him. (vs.21) Instead they reacted against him by worshipping dead images and idols. Ray Stedman made the observation years ago that "we started naming our cars after men like Lincoln and Ford – then birds (Hawk, Eagle, Falcon) – then animals (Cougar, Impala, Mustang) – even the reptile (Viper, Cobra)." For some the newest, shiniest car is their idol.

Verses 24-25 say, "Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised. Amen."

You know, I was raised in a home and at a time where we didn't even say the word "sex" let alone discuss sexual sins. They're not new to our times. It goes back to the beginning in Genesis when Lot's visitors were challenged to bring out the visitors to the lustful crowd. But sexual topics once avoided in conversations have changed with the times. Society's morals



have changed. Things once hidden are now out in the open and often shoved in our face.

Certainly homosexuality is at the forefront of our awareness today when it comes to sexual sin, (not that acceptance of adulterous situations aren't shown on nearly every TV show we see today!) But Gay Rights has made tremendous strides in our society as the increased openness and forced acceptance of what they term as an "alternative lifestyle" is foisted on society in every way and every day. Many well-meaning Christians think that if a relationship is rooted in love, how can God be against this? Why does the church have such a problem with the homosexual lifestyle? The reality is truth matters. If it matters to God, then it should matter to us – even when it appears to be opposite to what the world is professing should be acceptable. Confessing the truth of sin is every bit as important as confessing the truth of God's love. The world is pushing us further and further away from God – does that matter? If you are going to choose to believe that the entirety of the Bible is God's holy and true word, then the "consequences" of your belief are going to be adversarial to a world that refuses to believe in what you believe. The bigger the lie, the more harsh the reaction will be when it is confronted with the truth.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of heaven." Homosexuality is a sin, not a sickness or an innate sexual orientation (God didn't make man that way). But the good news of the gospel is that while homosexuality is a sin, it can be forgiven and overcome through the power of the Holy Spirit. The gospel is a message of hope. In 1 Corinthians 6:11 Paul writes, "and such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God."

In our minds we often "grade" sins, the worst being what we think of as the "biggie" sins – murder or sexual sins like adultery, homosexuality, pornography . . . but the Word of God should also convict our spirit when we see mention of the sins of gossip, insolent, arrogant, boastful, disobedient to parents, faithless, heartless, complacent. Are we? To God, sin is sin!

Billy Graham in one of his early books World Aflame wrote, "In a declining culture, one of its characteristics is that the

ordinary people are unaware of what is happening. The average man is comfortable in his complacency, as unconcerned as a silverfish in a carton of discarded magazines, on world affairs. He's not asking any questions, because his social benefits from the government give him false security! This is his trouble and his tragedy. Modern man has become a spectator on world events . . . observing on his television without being involved. He watches the ominous events of his time pass before his eyes while he sips his beer in a comfortable chair. He doesn't seem to realize what is happening to him. He doesn't understand that his world is on fire and he's about to be burned up with it."

The president of Columbia University added, "I divide the world into three parts: the few who make things happen, the many who watch things happen, and the vast majority of those who have no notion of what in the world is happening."

If you know Jesus Christ as your Savior, and you've spent some time in the Word of God, you know what's going to happen. Chapter 2, verse 4: "God's kindness, tolerance, and patience is meant to lead to repentance." But God will not be mocked, the world will reap what it sows and His wrath is coming.

Chapter 2 gives us seven principles of God's judgment:

1. **God's judgment is "according to truth" (vs.2)**

You can't preach one thing and live another.

2. **According to accumulated guilt (vs.5)**

Refusal to repent invites God's wrath.

3. **According to the life choice you make – good / evil (vs.6)** The righteous are rewarded and the evil perish.

4. **Without respect to persons (vs.11)**

God is totally fair.

5. **According to obedience, not knowledge (vs. 13)**

6. **Reaching the secrets of the heart (vs.16)**

Don't think you can hide sin from God.

7. **According to reality, not religious profession (vs. 17-29)** It's what you are inside, not just what you may show on the outside.

The first six were in our lesson today. We'll think about the last one next week.

Verses 12 and 13 are two of my particular "hot buttons."

Vs. 12 – "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."

God is a fair judge. Lack of knowledge is not an automatic sentence to Hell, but willful unrepentant sinfulness by rejecting the convicting work of the Holy Spirit is – especially when your

God-given conscience is at work. Why did Adam and Eve hide themselves? Their conscience told them they had sinned and shouldn't be in the presence of a holy God. Conscience is still at work today whether people have heard the gospel or not.

We in New Testament Christianity often mistakenly think that the "law" that was given to Moses on Mt. Sinai was nailed to the cross and that it no longer exists. Please understand this – the **debt of sin** that the law accused us of was nailed to the cross of Jesus. His blood paid in full the debt of sin you and I owe as sinners. The law itself, however, does exist. You have a choice... if you live by the law, you'll be judged by the law (you cannot be judged by something that does not exist). This was the constant problem Paul fought. Those who had experienced the freedom in Christ that grace brings wanted to go back under the law. Why?? Christ set us free! What a landmark day this will be when the church universal fully acknowledges the full meaning of grace and abandons a religious system of works to find favor with God.

But don't misunderstand me – we need vs. 13 – "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." Grace is not wholesale license to live any way we want to. Jesus said,

“You are my disciples if you do what I say.” The Christian life is one of obedience out of love for a personal Savior who gave us the gift of salvation.

Vs. 16 says, “God will judge men’s secrets . . .” You know, there’s a saying that goes, “A secret sin on earth is open scandal in heaven.” We need to remember that.

Paul closes chapter 2 in verses 17-29 chastising the Jews for their reliance on heredity and the Law of Moses as a secure source of salvation when, in fact, they so often break the Law and actually bring reproach to God by their actions before the Gentiles. Circumcision of the body isn’t what counts, it’s circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, that counts. “Such a man’s praise is not from men, but from God.” (vs. 29)

Well, it’s good to have a lesson on sin once in a while. It’s a reminder for us to stay sharp. Walking through this world bombarded by sinful temptation is like walking through a dark, low-ceiling coal mine where it’s so easy for the world’s dirt to rub off on us. Let’s close by asking ourselves, “How can we stay clean in that kind of environment?” I want to leave you with four thoughts:

1. Pay close attention to what you look at and listen to.

There is an “off” button for the TV. You can excuse

- yourself from a gossip group. You must take responsibility.
2. Think before you speak – develop a gracious tongue.  
Every one of us can remember a time when we wish we hadn't said something. You must exercise self- control.
  3. Think about the consequences of sin rather than its pleasures. The tentacles of sin are long and they wrap around you as well as others in your life. Guilt is a high price tag. You must count the cost as just too expensive.
  4. Start each day by renewing your sense of reverence for God and periodically through the day focus on Jesus.  
Only a conscience awareness of His presence will override the temptations life wants to throw our way. You must be so saturated with Him that, if sin knocks at the door, we send Jesus to answer for us.

Is cleanliness next to godliness? Spiritually speaking, cleanliness is godliness. The pastor speaking to Calvin Coolidge was against sin . . . so was Paul. Let's make sure we take our stand too.

